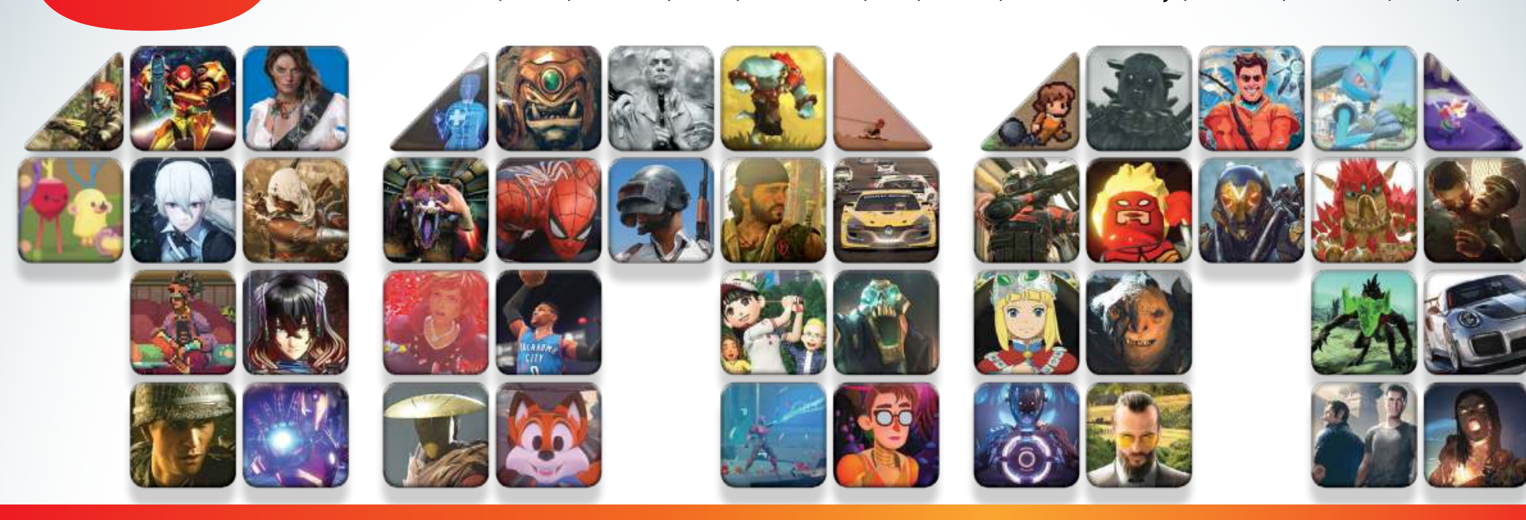
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HOTTEST NEW GAMES

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THE LAST OF US: PART II

SPIDER-MAN

SEA OF THIEVES

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

ANTHEM

ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS

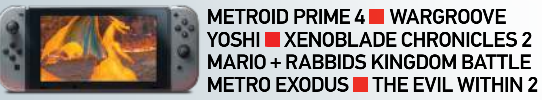
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

GOD OF WAR

CRACKDOWN 3

FORZA MOTORSPORT 7



METROID PRIME 4 ■ WARGROOVE
YOSHI ■ XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 2
MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE
METRO EXODUS ■ THE EVIL WITHIN 2



Future
ISSUE 189

STATE OF DECAY 2 ■ FAR CRY 5
UNCHARTED: THE LOST LEGACY
ASHEN ■ CUPHEAD ■ TACOMA
ORI AND THE WILL OF THE WISPS



WHITEDAY

a labyrinth named school

DARE YOU BRAVE THE NOTORIOUS KOREAN HORROR CLASSIC?



ESCAPE A HAUNTED SCHOOL IN THE YEAR'S MOST TERRIFYING REMAKE



RUN AND HIDE FROM KILLER STALKERS AND MALEVOLENT PHANTOMS



NINE DIFFERENT ENDINGS – WILL YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS SURVIVE?

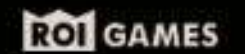
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The debate over CG trailers versus gameplay reveals at E3 reared its head in the **games™** office once again and it split the team for some time. For most of the argument I was firmly on the side of show me gameplay or show me nothing at all. For that reason the re-reveal trailer for *Beyond Good & Evil 2* left me a little cold despite my love of the original.

But then I saw Michel Ancel's reaction to the applause and appreciation as he took the stage. Later, I saw people losing their minds as Nintendo gradually revealed a logo for *Metroid Prime 4*. It was at this point that I began to question my position and think more about why those moments are still so powerful and I think it's because stoking the flames of fandom is what E3 is supposed to be about.

For many publishers E3 has become an extended live advertising event where they can capture the attention of hardcore gamers for 90 minutes to tell us all about the games and hardware they want us to buy in the next six months. But it also used to be about making you feel good about being a gamer. It used to be about wish fulfilment and making dreams come true. That's why Sony's *Shenmue III* and *FFVII Remake* conference was so potent. That's why Nintendo only needed to show a logo for *Metroid* for us to be deliriously happy.

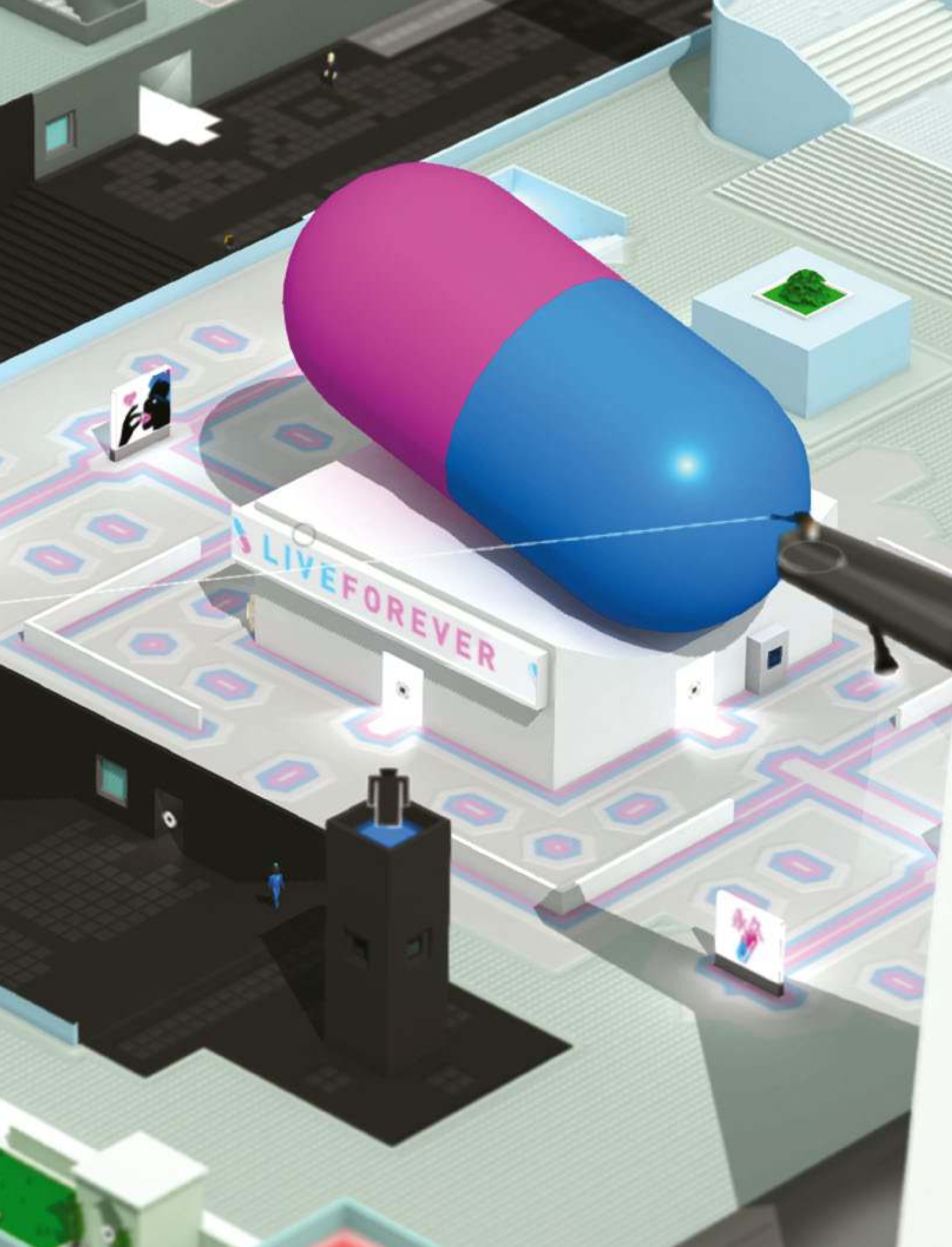
If we can't get excited for the promise of a great game without any context at all, then I would worry we've lost touch with what always made this community so much fun.

Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR

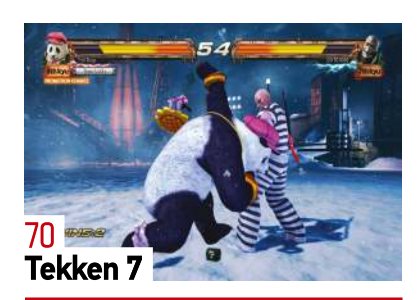



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Sniper Rifle
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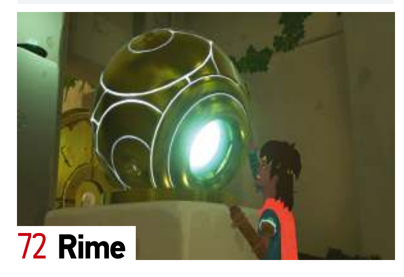

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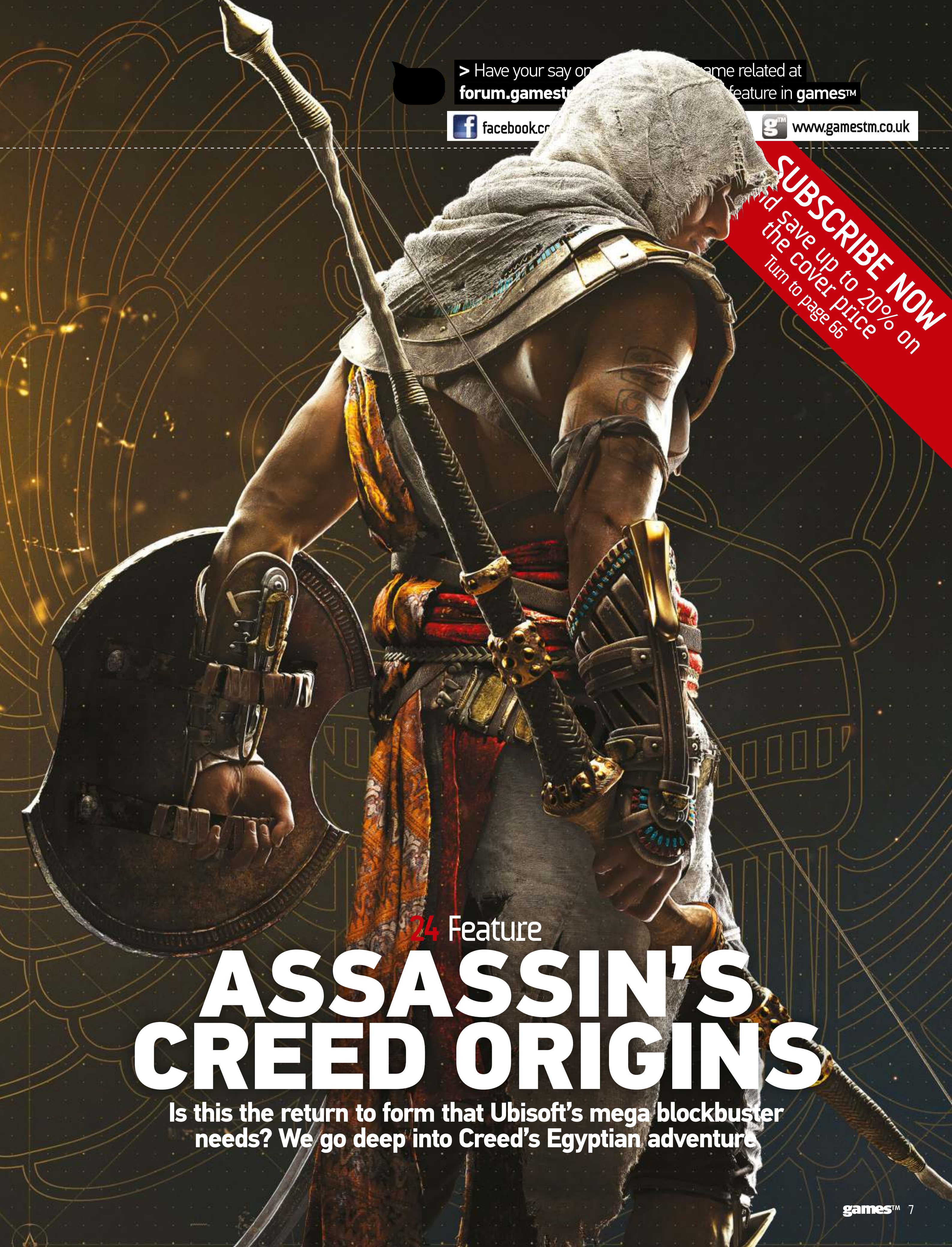

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ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS

Is this the return to form that Ubisoft's mega blockbuster needs? We go deep into Creed's Egyptian adventure



SHOULDER MOUNTED

The shoulder-mounted weapon position seems to be of particular interest and significance. We've seen targeted missile launchers and mortar cannons showcased and each appear to have been picked out by the player.

POWER OF THREE

Similar to how abilities worked in *The Division*, your class of suit comes pre-loaded with special moves that you can utilise in the field, each mapped to a shoulder button or both pressed together. These can include firing your special shoulder-mounted weapon.

> "THESE SUITS GIVE PLAYERS SUPERHUMAN CAPABILITIES AND ARE HEAVILY CUSTOMISABLE SO THAT THEY LOOK AND PLAY HOW YOU WANT."
> JONATHAN WARNER, GAME DIRECTOR

POWER ARMOUR

The Javelin suits essentially act as your base class loadout when you head out into the field, so while you can have multiple armour types ready, some specialisation to balance with your team seems sensible.



ARM CANDY

Some concept art we've seen would also appear to suggest that the Javelin suits can be customised with special arm upgrades too, presumably giving you unique melee attacks in battle. It's going to be interesting playing around with these new toys.

DYNAMIC EVENTS

Weather events, called Shaper Storms, can seemingly sweep in with little warning and tear up the environment around you. It may well be that these are only one form of dynamic event you'll need to contend with in *Anthem*.

HOW ANTHEM GOT US UP ON OUR FEET

BIOWARE REMINDS US OF ITS TRUE POTENTIAL WITH A STUNNING NEW CO-OP SHOOTER

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PS4, PC** | RELEASE: **FALL 2018**
4K:**YES** | PUBLISHER: **EA** | DEVELOPER: **BIOWARE**

We do enjoy a little E3 surprise, and probably the biggest we got wasn't just that EA revealed the original *Mass Effect* team's latest game, but that it had gameplay to show us too. In an industry that still sometimes seems far too pleased with itself when it releases a flashy CG trailer, it's refreshing to see a major publisher and developer show real, in-game action to get us hyped for a game.

It could be argued, of course, that BioWare was in no position to do much else for a couple of important reasons. First, *Anthem* is sounding too much like a mash-up of *Destiny* and *The Division,* and it needed to show its true colours in order to get any distance from those releases. Second, after the reception *Andromeda* got, BioWare doesn't want to see its collective reputation slip any further or see its new game mired in recrimination about its last. So here we have *Anthem*, a third-person co-op shooter in an open sandbox setting that looks absolutely stunning.

And it's the sandbox element that might ultimately help to set *Anthem* apart from its genre stablemates. While *Destiny* has leaned on instanced locations and *The Division* offered a grounded recreation of New York, *Anthem* is far more open and designed for emergent moments as much as narrative threads. That's something a little new for BioWare, a studio much more heavily associated with storytelling excellence than the randomness of the open world, but it's already looking very promising.

A more directed story thread seems very likely given the team's background, but it isn't revealing anything for the time being. What we do know is that you'll be playing as a Freelancer, a group known for their heroism in stepping outside of the confines of the Wall to face the creatures and dangers beyond in search of glory, riches and adventures. The first region we've seen is called Fort Tarsus, although there seems to be a strong possibility this isn't the only outpost of »



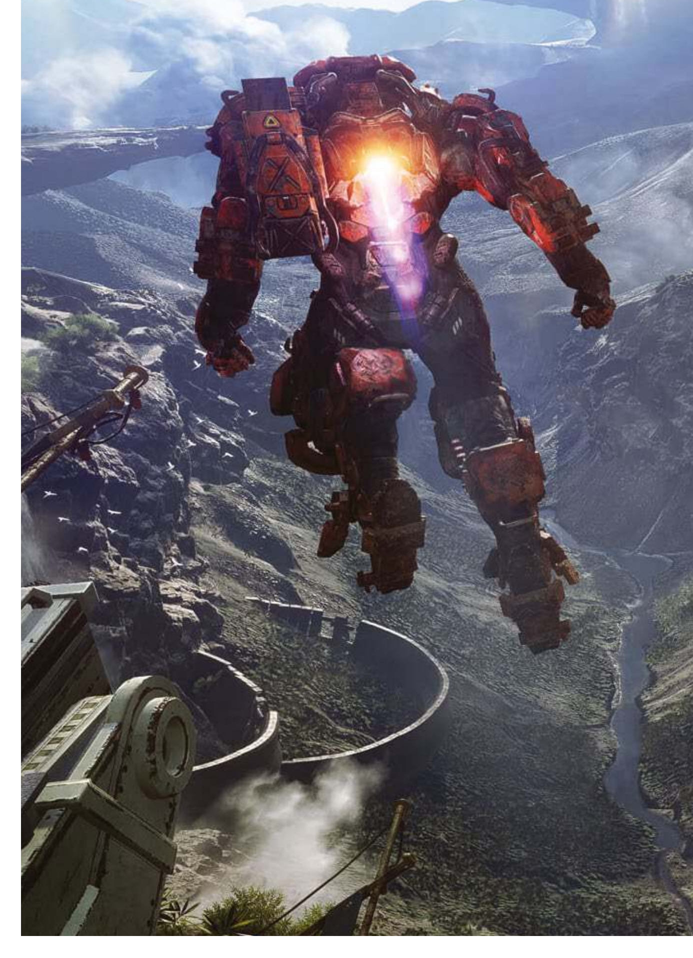
The facial animations in *Anthem* are in stark contrast to what we saw from some characters in *Mass Effect Andromeda*. This game is showing a lot more polish from its in-game assets at this early stage than BioWare's last game did.

humanity you'll be able to visit. It's a mix of cultural identities, a melting pot of ideas with a bustling market and examples of hand-craftmanship as well as highly advanced technology. It's in Fort Tarsus that you'll be picking up your quests out in the wilds.

This is when you'll want to pick the right equipment to face whatever you're going to find out there. You'll pilot a type of exo-suit called a Javelin and they come in many varieties. Two have been confirmed so far, being the Ranger, which is relatively balanced and all-purpose and the Colossus, which is more of a tank type. You're allowed to own multiple suits so you can have each class of armament at your disposal before you head out if you want. That's a nice touch for anyone who finds being tied down to a playstyle in something like *Destiny* a bit of a drag over time. Now you don't need to worry about having multiple profiles saved as you can just have the suit ready to go. While the other classes haven't been confirmed yet something along the lines of a stealth or rogue type and a tech and energy specialist seem likely. We got a short glimpse of how some other players customised their suits during the gameplay demo, but not close enough to make too many conclusions.

> "IT'S A DYNAMIC WORLD WHERE THE UNEXPECTED IS AROUND EVERY CORNER."
> JONATHAN WARNER, GAME DIRECTOR

What we have been able to see and hear is that each suit can be given a custom look and armaments, so that even within their particular speciality you can find the balance of abilities and add-ons to suit you. We're thinking this is going to be pretty similar to the way in which *The Division* handled its roles in that you picked your own preferences of abilities and weapons when you went out onto the streets of New York and they could be as complementary to your overall balance as a player or to the balance of your team as you want. And it should be stated clearly, just as BioWare has tried to do, that while *Anthem* seems clearly to be designed with co-op play in mind it can be experienced solo if you want. It's yet to be made clear whether or not missions will scale to you playing alone





Loot drops look to be powering a lot of the experience here as you might expect and weapons appear to carry similar grandiose and fun naming conventions to Bungie's *Destiny* series.

MATHS EFFECT

MIX THESE INGREDIENTS TOGETHER AND BIOWARE'S LATEST SEEMS LIKELY TO EMERGE

DESTINY

One of the clearer comparisons to what *Anthem* is looking to establish in terms of a sci-fi world, loot-based upgrades, co-op shooting and exploration. Bungie is refining its take on this concept with *Destiny 2*, but *Anthem* is playing in a similar field.

+ THE DIVISION

Since *Anthem* is primarily a third-person shooter, Ubisoft's shared world experience shares a lot of tonal and gameplay elements with BioWare's new game. The co-op demo we've seen felt a lot like co-op players in *The Division*'s early reveals.

+ HORIZON: ZERO DAWN

This one is all about world design, not gameplay, as *Anthem* has a mix of nature and technology that reminds us a lot Guerrilla's hit RPG. The giant walking robot and the signs of civilization taken over by nature are the key touchstones.

+ TITANFALL

People climbing into mechs and then leaping around like a bunch of loons? Sounds like *Titanfall* to us. The EA connection between Respawn and BioWare may have seen some shared experience here too. Clearly, this is more co-op driven though.

+ RAGE

This might just be us, but the world building of the community, its mix of cultures and its survivalist edges reminded us a lot of id Software's shooter from the last generation. Some of the same sense of modern cultures re-imagined through sci-fi is in this game.

− MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA

It doesn't take long looking at the graphical effects and particularly the facial animations of *Anthem* to see that this is a different team to the one that put *Andromeda* together. The early demos already appear to have more detail and a greater emotional range.



With such as open world the opportunities for flanking and quite expansive tactical play seem pretty positive. If you get a good, tight crew together you could have a lot of fun working your way through missions.

or indeed scale up to the most experienced player if you're with others, so we'll need to wait to hear more about that.

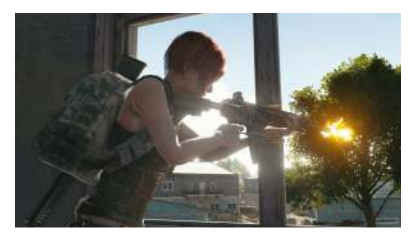
Whatever mission you happen to take on from Fort Tarsus, whether it be taking on Scar enemies, rescuing foolhardy workers or clearing out dangerous animals, you may want to tool up in a different way or perhaps even be prepared for your plan to change entirely. One of the nice elements of *Anthem* since it doesn't appear to have any loading screens once you leave a compound to head out into the world, is that it is fully open to explore and you're as likely to find something interesting or distracting on your way towards a mission as you are to enjoy the task you were intending to perform in the first place. BioWare is promising plenty of random moments in the game that will greatly impact gameplay such as giant creatures you might have to take on, roving bandit groups or the Shaper Storms that appear to be massive disturbances that tear up the jungle and may or may not be gateways to something else entirely (another secret BioWare is playing close to its chest).

And perhaps to further enhance and reflect that freedom of choice, exploration and player-driven experience there's no shortage of heights to scale or depths to dive into. The gameplay demo gave us a great glimpse at both with seemingly limitless use of the Javelin's flight capabilities allowing the Freelancers to move around at pace and take on challenges from all sorts of interesting vantages. The seemingly unlimited flight in combination with the freedom of movement around the game world should combine for exactly the kind of exploration and world-building experience that we were crying out for from *Destiny* and *The Division*, so it's good to see that BioWare appears to be taking heed of the feedback fans were giving those games.

BioWare is binding this all together by saying it wants to make a frictionless experience, allowing you to play how you prefer, go where you want in the game world and join in with friends at any time with as little interference as possible. It wouldn't be drawn on questions of PvP just yet, although it strikes us as likely that some form of competitive mode would be available through the game somehow, not least because such modes have the potential to keep us playing long after we've squeezed everything else out of an experience. However, BioWare has also assured us that *Anthem* is a game built with continued support and expansion in mind. No details on what that could actually look like, but post-launch DLC seems assured at the very least.

So BioWare is making all the right noises and while there's clearly comparisons to be made to other titles already out there this generation, there is something a little special about what the Edmonton team is putting together. It fight be ticking many of the shared-world shooter boxes that we're familiar with, but it's already showing enough character of its own to feel unique.

SHARED SHOOTERS ON THE RISE



PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

It's one of the most intense and engaging distillations of a battle royal format we've ever experienced and it's great to see that Early Access fame is translating into a wider release. Can you survive this 100-player maelstrom to be the last one standing? That's what it's all about.



STRANGE BRIGADE

Rebellion's take on the shared co-op shooter experience draws a little from survival horror and a little from *Uncharted* as it brings some character to what might otherwise have been a fairly standard zombie horde experience. It's leaning on team's experience with *Sniper Elite* and *Zombie Army* series to good effect.



FORTNITE

It's great to see Epic's horde and base-building shooter step out of its extended beta testing and restate its intentions to blow us away on PC and consoles. It's use of class enhanced abilities and easy to use crafting should make it a great co-op experience and we still really like its sense of fun and style.



THE DARWIN PROJECT

Bringing together some of the most popular gaming forms of recent memory with elements that remind us of classic MOBA gameplay, *Overwatch* and even a little of *Battlegrounds*' last-player-standing scheme, *The Darwin Project* is seemingly built for the eSports world. It's bright, colourful, action-packed and definitely one to watch.

IS THE XBOX ONE X WORTH £450 OF YOUR MONEY?



MICROSOFT'S MOST POWERFUL CONSOLE EVER MIGHT STILL HAVE SOME CONVINCING TO DO

So, did Microsoft's E3 press conference get you pumped for its upcoming hardware upgrade and the 4K experiences you'll get to enjoy? Possibly not if the reaction we've seen online is any indication, but it does feel to us like the culmination of a three-year journey with Phil Spencer at the head of Xbox that has seen the company rise from generational laughing stock at launch to real hardware contender today.

But let's look at the console in isolation for a moment first. What does the console formerly known as Project Scorpio have to offer us exactly beyond a litany of stats and impressive-sounding numbers? For a start, the numbers weren't all talk. Those six teraflops are being put to good use to deliver 60 frames per second and native 4K resolutions to games like *Forza Motorsport 7*. Now, we always expect Turn 10 to deliver on the graphical front well ahead of most of the competition, just as it did at the launch of the console, but actually we're seeing a number of games deliver at the top end, even from third parties.

And Microsoft may well need to rely on third parties in order to gain any traction when the Xbox One X launches on 7 November, because its first-party exclusives didn't really blow us away. *Forza*, as mentioned, looked incredible, but the mainline racing sim has always been a hardcore driving fan's playground, not a mass appeal release like the *Horizon* spin-offs have become. *Crackdown 3* on the other hand, looks to be holding true to the look and feel of the original game on Xbox 360, but we've yet to see anything from it that could match the spectacle of something like *Infamous Second Son*. The rest of the exclusive lineup is made up of indie releases, many of them very interesting, but few that would ever be considered console sellers.

However, look at the list of games scheduled to get 4K patches for the release of the Xbox One X and you see very different picture again. Titles like *Gears Of War 4*, *Forza Horizon 3*, *Resident Evil VII*, *Final Fantasy XV*, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, *Dishonored 2*, *Titanfall 2*, *Fallout 4* and many more. That's an intimidating list of 4K supporting titles that will mean that if you own an Xbox One already, you should instantly start seeing improvements to your favourite titles. And then the late 2017 and 2018 releases join the party with *Assassin's Creed* supporting the Xbox One X alongside *Shadow Of War* and followed later by *Anthem* and *Metro Exodus*.

Xbox chief Phil Spencer has overseen a significant change of fortunes for the gaming division of Microsoft.

> "HERE'S A SIMPLE TRUTH WE UNDERSTAND AS HARDENED GAMERS OURSELVES; MORE IS JUST MORE."

Just like the Xbox One S, the new 4K console will not feature a Kinect port for the consoles motion control camera, likely putting a firm fullstop on the ambitious, but poorly supported hardware.

Where does that leave us? Well, we've seen a number of commentators lament the lack of earth-shattering support for the console from Microsoft itself (a *Halo* release, for instance, may have appeased them) with predictions that the case still hasn't been made for why 4K matters for gaming. But here's a simple truth we understand as hardened gamers ourselves; more is just more. Did we choose PS4 over Xbox One in our droves at launch in 2013 because Sony had a better launch lineup or because it could pretty much promise that every third-party game then and to follow would be better on its console? Did we or did we not obsess over whether or not resolutions would hit 1080p at 60fps or be upscaled from 900p or, heaven forbid, 720p? We seem to recall a lot of ink being spent on these issues in the early months of the generation and now it will be Xbox in the power position.

We think there's every chance that the question of native 4K versus crosshatching or upscaled 4K will become the new dividing line between the consoles. PlayStation has a massive head start that Xbox may struggle to make up before a new generation spins into action, but if you're yet to commit or just believe in always having the most cutting-edge gaming hardware, Xbox One X is clearly the way to go. And when you consider it's only £30 more expensive than the original console launched for, we'd suggest it's just inside the affordability bracket.

Is Xbox One X worth your money? Just as with the PS4 Pro, if you have a 4K TV and even more so now if you want to start watching 4K Blu-rays and other media, the additional power this console brings and the support it's already getting makes it very impressive. This is every bit the cutting edge hardware Microsoft promised and that is very exciting indeed.

Much to everyone's surprise, the Xbox One X is the smallest console that Microsoft has produced to date. You might think that's not exactly hard considering the beasts its produced in the past, but considering its additional power and internal power source, we're impressed

"IF YOU'RE YET TO COMMIT OR JUST BELIEVE IN ALWAYS HAVING THE MOST CUTTING-EDGE GAMING HARDWARE, XBOX ONE X IS CLEARLY THE WAY TO GO."

THE BIG COMPARISON

HOW DOES IT STAND UP TO THE PS4 PRO?

	XBOX ONE X	PS4 Pro
PRICE	£449/$499	£349/$399
GPU	Integrated AMD graphics	Integrated AMD graphics
GPU TERAFLOPS	6 teraflops of processing power	4.2 teraflops of processing power
CPU	Eight custom cores	Custom AMD Jaguar 8-core
CPU SPEED	2.3GHz	2.1GHz
MEMORY (RAM)	12GB GDDR5	8GB GDDR5
STORAGE (HDD)	1TB	1TB
OPTICAL DRIVE	4K/HDR Blu-ray	Blu-ray/DVD
4K SUPPORT	Yes	Yes
HDR	Yes	Yes
DIMENSIONS	11.8 x 9.4 x 2.4 inches	12.8 x 11.6 x 2.1 inches
WEIGHT	8.4lbs	7.2lbs



THE BIG NUMBERS



XBOX ONE X BOASTS IMPRESSIVE STATS ACROSS THE BOARD

7 BILLION
transistors on the Xbox One X chip

360
square mm of silicon to make the chip

15,000
connections for incoming and outgoing signals

50x50mm
casing for the SOC, the largest Microsoft has produced

APPROX. 30 MILLION
Xbox One consoles sold to date



DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN

THE MOST AMBITIOUS GAME IN ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT

FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **QUANTIC DREAM** | RELEASE: **2018**

At this point you have to wonder whether David Cage enjoys playing with fire or simply cannot escape it. *Detroit: Become Human* is, quite frankly, insane, and Sony are insane for going along with it. And honestly, we couldn't be happier. *Detroit* is going to change the industry; the nuance in its character animation and capture will raise the bar to an impossible height. The narrative is set to be a sprawling web of decisions and consequences, interconnected in a way that we have never seen before in a videogame. All of this will afford you the freedom and opportunity to construct your own path through this neo-noir thriller, and in a way that is honestly completely unprecedented in gaming history.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2

NO SERIOUSLY, IT'S HAPPENING. WELL, MAYBE.

FORMAT: **TBC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTPELLIER** | RELEASE: **TBC**

For creative director Michel Ancel, this announcement marks the end of a tumultuous few years. For us, it is merely the beginning. "I have to say thank you to the fans for sticking with us for so long," he says, wiping a tear from his eye. He's overwhelmed because, 14 years after its debut, after a decade of teasing a sequel, his beloved cult classic is finally returning. This swashbuckling prequel is a few years off, mind, with the team spending the last three years focused on developing the tech to power this wildly ambitious endeavour. We're certain it'll be worth the wait; this is, after all, an opportunity for Ubisoft to defiantly exercise its creative freedom.



Launching 7 November, *Crackdown 3* will be available day and date with the Xbox One X.

THERE'S MORE TO CRACKDOWN 3 THAN TOTAL DESTRUCTION

THE AGENCY IS BACK IN ACTION

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS**
DEVELOPER: **SUMO DIGITAL, REAGENT GAMES** | RELEASE: **7 NOV 2017**

From the moment of its reveal, *Crackdown 3* was always being sold on its destruction – on allowing you to become an agent of mayhem; on bringing an entire city to its knees. But now, two years after it disappeared into the shadows, *Crackdown 3* has re-emerged looking far more familiar, the shine of its technical accomplishments worn away by time.

There's more to *Crackdown 3* than pure destruction, though, with the entire package looking to service old-school franchise fans and those that just want to watch the world burn without dropping a frame. "We were very aware of giving our players a choice in how they want to play," reveals *Crackdown*'s design director, Clint Bundrick. "In our campaign, we've built this incredible open-world sandbox that allows players to unleash destruction and mayhem using weapons, props and vehicles, but you're not levelling our city, New Providence, to the ground – think about it, what kind of hero destroys the city they were meant to save?"

The campaign will be a familiar comfort, set across an open world twice the size of Pacific City – entirely accessible and conquerable from the beginning, should you have the skills and perseverance. Your in-game proficiencies scale with time, the status of the Terra Nova criminal syndicate reacts and breaks in real-time to your actions in-game, and, yes, Agility Orbs will still trigger an obsessive compulsion. But that isn't all this experience will offer – Microsoft assures us that the Cloud is still alive and powerful.

"Get into multiplayer and the power of Cloud takes over, charging the experience for you to wield destruction as a weapon, letting players go ahead and totally level the battlefield."







WOLFENSTEIN II: THE NEW COLOSSUS BRINGS THE BATTLE BACK HOME

THE SULTRY SOUND OF ULTRA-VIOLENCE

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PS4, PC** | 4K: **TBC** | PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA** | DEVELOPER: **MACHINEGAMES** | RELEASE: **27 OCT 2017**

MachineGames has demonstrated a commendable aptitude for virtual violence. It knows what the gaming populous wants, and it wants to kill Nazis. It wants to decapitate them and it wants to decimate them – that much is clear. The response to it has been palpable. And so the studio has delivered in *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*, a blistering, bloody, and frequently brutal first-person shooter that is gleeful and grotesque in equal measure.

In the three years since *Wolfenstein: The New Order* first shocked us into submission, MachineGames has been patiently improving upon its core strengths. The engine has been overhauled, with *The New Colossus* being built upon a modified iteration of id Tech 6 – the engine that powered *Doom*'s bold return to the fore in 2016. This has ensured that *Wolfenstein* looks and plays better than ever before; it's still a hardcore first-person shooter, only now it's one with a stronger sense of place and purpose.

Returning force of nature BJ Blazkowicz has been transformed into a full first-person model in-game, as opposed to a pair of floating hands with a disembodied voice attached, meaning that the studio can get cute with the gameplay scenarios that it presents. Hell, the opening act is played from the seat of a wheelchair, with BJ dual-wielding his way through hordes of Nazis as he deals with the crippling injuries bestowed upon him in *The New Order*'s closing moments by General Deathshead.

> "WE ARE TRYING TO STAY TRUE TO WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF WOLFENSTEIN: REAL HARDCORE FIRST-PERSON COMBAT."
> JENS MATTHIES, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MACHINEGAMES

In fact, you can now dual-wield weapons independently, giving you further precision over your ability to quickly maim anything so much as resembling an enemy, with limbs flying and torsos disintegrating in a way that can only be described as comically homicidal.

An entire team has been dedicated to developing and improving upon *Wolfenstein*'s combat mechanics over the last three years, and the results are already clear. *The New Colossus* is a shooter that simply can't be ignored, its gunplay meeting phenomenal level design to create a beautiful picture, a shooting gallery you simply must book a ticket to visit later this October.

While the rebooted *Doom* excelled in similar elements to *Wolfenstein*, this series still has something that Doom could never claim to have, and that's a beating heart beneath the chaos. *Doom* was content to rip its own from its chest and eviscerate it in front of you – showering in the spectacle of blood with a knowing smile – whereas Wolfenstein still finds the time to build characters with soul, developing quiet moments of considered storytelling around the shrieking sounds of ultra-violence. *The New Colossus* isn't just more of the same; it's building upon something truly special – a shooter that excels in destroying large portions of humanity while finding a little piece of its own in the process.

MachineGames has reaffirmed its commitment to a single-player experience, noting that it has no interest in including multiplayer for *Wolfenstein II*.


Not a fan of the new logo on this suit? Insomniac says there will be other costumes in the game.

SPIDER-MAN SWINGS BACK INTO ACTION

INSOMNIAC GAMES DETAILS PETER PARKERS' AWESOME PS4 DEBUT

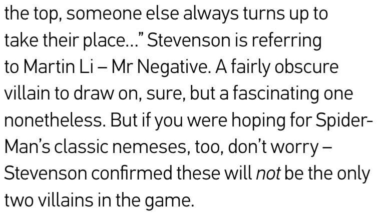
FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **INSOMNIAC** | RELEASE: **2018**

We've seen far too many Spider-Man origin stories. From the Toby Maguire film trilogy to the ill-fated Andrew Garfield set, from the myriad animated series to endless runs of comic books. We all know what happens: high school misfit gets bitten by a spider, takes on its abilities and grows from amateur crime-fighter to web-slinging superhero.

Insomniac Games isn't interested in retreading that ground. "We're not telling an origin story," the developer's James Stevenson tells us as he jumps from building-to-building in the new PS4 game, demonstrating the new physics-based traversal mechanic (that's beautifully reminiscent of *Spider-Man 2*). "Our story starts with a 23-year old Peter Parker, who is graduating college and has a job working in a laboratory. Think of him as an athlete in his prime. That's where you pick up the game."

The game seems to accelerate pretty quickly, too: "Very early on, you defeat Wilson Fisk – Kingpin," Stevenson continues. "Spider-Man gets cocky, thinks he has the city under control, but when you get rid of the man at the top, someone else always turns up to take their place..." Stevenson is referring to Martin Li – Mr Negative. A fairly obscure villain to draw on, sure, but a fascinating one nonetheless. But if you were hoping for Spider-Man's classic nemeses, too, don't worry – Stevenson confirmed these will *not* be the only two villains in the game.

Insomniac is jumping in at the deep end, then: by the time you start playing, Spider-Man will already be well established as the hero of New York City; you start with access to a whole arsenal of gadgetry, acrobatic abilities, fancy combat moves. There'll be RPG systems in place to progress these foundations of gameplay, but from the off you'll be able to control a Spider-Man that'll feel familiar to anyone with even a passing interest in the character.



It's not all about the man in the mask, though. Insomniac wants to make that clear. Peter Parker is as much of a character in this as the eponymous vigilante, and Stevenson seemed to choose his words very intentionally when he told us 'you'll be playing as both Peter Parker and Spider-Man'.


Despite his enemies' best efforts to kill him, Spider-Man will be strictly non-lethal in this game.


When you start the game, Peter Parker will already be well-established as NYC's hero.

A TALE OF TWO SPIDERS

Peter Parker may be off in his own little universe here, but that doesn't mean other characters from the Earth-616 and 1610 realms won't be joining him. Mister Negative can be seen as the villain, but that isn't what has grabbed the attention of Spidey fans around the world. The young Miles Morales can be seen in promotional material, and it's been confirmed that he has a larger role in *Spider-Man* than a mere cameo. While Insomniac wouldn't be drawn on whether Morales would be playable or grabbing his suit, he will supposedly have a large role to play in the story – helping us to see another side to Peter in the process.

"We think the best Spider-Man stories are told when [the worlds of Parker and Spider-Man] collide," he explains. "In this game – which is a brand new universe, by the way – Peter Parker has trouble paying his bills, balancing his work and just *being* Spider-Man. Peter's love life, too, is always a part of any Spider-Man story (and it's always complicated!) so that will naturally be a part of our game, too."

It's refreshing to see Insomniac tackle that side of Peter from a game's perspective – you can draw many comparisons to Rocksteady's *Arkham* games when you see Spider-Man in action (and you might even go as far as to call the melee derivative), but Insomniac is doing something the DC franchise never did: getting to know the man in the middle of the web.

Spider-Man's gadgetry and athletic moveset are also infinitely more stylish than Batman's rather rigid animations and abilities, too – you can tell Insomniac learned a lot about fluidity from the development of *Sunset Overdrive*, because the flexibility with which Spider-Man fights and traverses are best in class as far as superhero games go. And that mobility is going to be pretty necessary, as the playable area of the game is *huge*.

"You can free roam around all of Manhattan," Stevenson explains as he busts through a falling sign in a white-knuckle helicopter chase. "The best way to think about it is that it's four-to-six times the size of the *Sunset Overdrive* map. *Spider-Man* is the biggest game we've ever made."

Of course, bigger doesn't necessarily mean better, but Insomniac has a proven record when it comes to open world games, and aside from the empowering combat system and loaded story, a new Spider-Man game with momentum-based web-swinging traversal is what fans have been hankering for since 2004 – and from what we've seen so far, Insomniac looks set to deliver it.

GAMES WITH COMIC FLAIR



MARVEL VS CAPCOM: INFINITE

It was a shame that the story demo of this new fighter was so poor, because our experience of the broader game and in particular how the two versus two setup adds some immediacy and intimacy to the fight was very positive. Don't give up on this one yet (but those Chun-Li and Dante models can burn).



EXTINCTION

An interesting shift in direction from Iron Galaxy, famed for *Divekick* and the *Killer Instinct* reboot, as it channels *Warhammer* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* for a pretty epic brawler. It's got plenty of colour, some nice flair effects and a more than a hint of *Attack On Titan* to it with its movement.



PROJECT CODE: SHIFT

Revealed as an ID@Xbox release by Microsoft during its E3 conference, SHIFT is a stunning looking side-scrolling brawler with some amazingly smooth animation, insane combo building and, did we forget to mention, a mechanic where you shift between feudal Japan and a sci-fi future. Weird, but wonderful.



LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES 2

All of the gang is getting back to together and with renewed clarity of purpose as this LEGO game will benefit greatly from releasing on only current gen platforms. Expect to see higher resolution textures, smoother frame-rates and a generally more polished final experience from TT Games.

HELLBLADE SETS A DATE

CAN NINJA THEORY'S EXPERIMENTAL EFFORT DELIVER?

FORMAT: **PS4, PC** | RELEASE: **8 AUG 2017** | 4K: **TBC**
PUBLISHER: **NINJA THEORY** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**

If all goes to plan, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* could be something of a revolution in the industry. Ninja Theory is describing its upcoming psychological horror adventure title as an 'independent triple-A' game, an experimental effort that – in spite of the small team responsible for the bulk of the work – still delivers the production values of any other triple-A title on the market.

Ninja Theory has utilised and developed some of the best motion capture technology in the industry.

Much has been said of *Hellblade* over the years, with Ninja Theory continuing to impress with its top of the line motion capture technology and agile approach to development, though it'll be 8 August where we will see if it pays off. The game will be working to the studio's strengths, leaning on the proficiencies demonstrated in titles such as *Heavenly Sword* and *DmC: Devil May Cry* –expect incredible combat, strong character development and, of course, a visually arresting art style. The studio has, however, been keen to set expectations; while *Hellblade* is one of the most visually impressive titles releasing in 2017, it is supposed to be the return of the 'mid-size game'; it's half the size of a triple-A game, sold at half the price, and skimming on none of the quality.



DRAGON BALL FIGHTER Z

ARK SYSTEMS IS MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE** | PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **ARK SYSTEM WORKS** | RELEASE: **TBC**

Without question one of the biggest surprises of the year so far has been Namco Bandai enlisted the services of Ark System Works – the creators of the *Guilty Gear* franchise – to lend its immeasurable talent to *Dragon Ball Z*, delivering a 2.5D brawler that's taking the fight to *Marvel Vs Capcom*'s doorstep. Featuring a three-versus-three team battle system, a huge roster of classic characters, and the sort of chaotic spectacle that made the manga and anime so beloved to begin with. We've long dreamt of going Super Saiyan in a game such as this, but with just 20 per cent of development completed we might be waiting a little while to be given the chance to indulge in our wildest DBZ fighting fantasies.

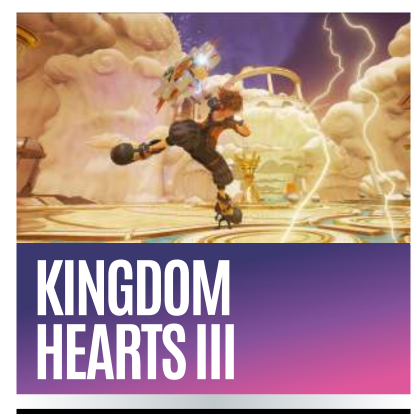
KNACK 2

YOU HAVE TO HAND IT TO SONY, IT NEVER QUITS

FORMAT: **PS4** | PUBLISHER: **SONY** | 4K: **YES**
DEVELOPER: **SIE JAPAN STUDIO** | RELEASE: **5 SEP 2017**

Knack may have fallen a little flat when it launched alongside the PS4 back in 2013, the action-adventure impressing with its physics system but failing to ignite the imagination. But here we are, with the eponymous character reassembling itself once again for round two; while we're still struggling to see the appeal, Sony is certainly trying to right a few wrongs here. The combat and platforming has been overhauled entirely, giving *Knack 2* better control and opportunities in battle, while the style and tone has been altered to be a little more self referential – poking fun at the shortcomings of its predecessor in the process. Will *Knack 2* be a hit with kids and parents alike? We don't have long to wait to find out.





KINGDOM HEARTS III

THE LONG WAIT CONTINUES

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE** | 4K: **TBC** | PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | RELEASE: **2018**

Another E3, another delay on *Kingdom Hearts III*; a sequel we've been waiting well over a decade for, the wait only becomes that much harder to bear when a new slice of sumptuous gameplay is thrust under our eyes. Seeing Sora slice his way through a Hercules-inspired stage was everything we could have ever hoped for, showcasing the game's ridiculously expanded scope, towering enemies to battle, and an array of dazzling upgrades to the combat systems. *Kingdom Hearts III* won't be arriving until 2018 at the earliest, but it's still one of the most exciting RPGs in active development. Plenty of time, then, to catch up on the franchise's convoluted web of interconnected sequels, prequels and tie-in media – good luck!

THE BEST OF VIRTUAL REALITY

THE VR TITLES THAT HAVE GRABBED OUR ATTENTION WITH THEIR INNOVATION



MOSS VR

FORMAT: **PSVR** | DEVELOPER: **POLYARC** | RELEASE: **2017**

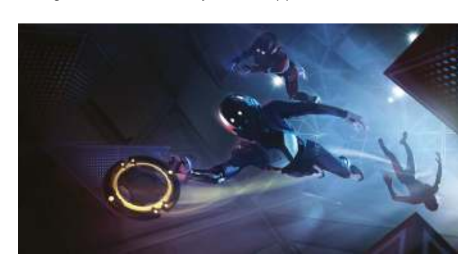
Bored of the array of gritty titles arriving on PSVR? *Moss* developer Polyarc is hoping its adorable adventure game can turn the tide, bringing a title heavily inspired by the *Legend Of Zelda* to the platform. *Moss* sees you taking on the role of Quill, a tiny mouse in a big world, as you to guide the heroine through her journey. You better get those Move controllers charged up because there's nothing quite like *Moss* to be found in VR just now.



TRANSFERENCE

FORMAT: **OR, VIVE, PSVR** | DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL** | RELEASE: **2018**

Formed between Ubisoft Montreal and SpectreVision – that's Elijah Wood's film studio – is *Transference*, a psychological thriller built for VR. It transports you to a world where human memories can be digitally recreated, pushing players to navigate the past of a character called Walter – a victim of PTSD. Ominous and unsettling, *Transference* is an intriguing exploration of the format, though those with anxiety should approach with caution.



ECHO ARENA

FORMAT: **OR** | DEVELOPER: **READY AT DAWN** RELEASE: **20 AUG 2017**

We are still exploring the possibilities of VR, but one of the most exciting developments is that of true virtual sports coming to our living rooms. *Echo Arena* will be one of the first to hit market, thrusting ten players into a huge arena – bringing a whole new definition to the term 'Ultimate Frisbee'. Developed by *The Order: 1886* developer Ready At Dawn exclusively for Oculus Rift, this frantic sport could really help eSports sink its teeth into VR.



THE PERSISTENCE

FORMAT: **PSVR** | DEVELOPER: **FIRESPRITE LTD.** RELEASE: **TBC**

A perilous situation, mutated crew, and array of futuristic weaponry at your disposal? Yup, this sounds a lot like a sci-fi horror game to us. *The Persistence* is one of the more innovative VR games coming to PS4 in 2017 as it procedurally generates the damage ship around you every time that you die, which is your only opportunity to upgrade your character with resources harvested from the creatures located throughout the various areas.



THE INPATIENT

FORMAT: **PSVR** | DEVELOPER: **SUPERMASSIVE GAMES** RELEASE: **TBC**

A horror game from *Until Dawn* developer Supermassive Games, *The Inpatient* throws players into Blackwood Sanatorium with no memory of who they are or how they landed in the ominous asylum. *The Inpatient* has no firm release date, but the game's fully-realised body models and voice controls make this look like one of the more innovative titles coming to PSVR in the future.



BRAVO TEAM

FORMAT: **PSVR** | DEVELOPER: **SUPERMASSIVE GAMES** RELEASE: **TBC**

Farpoint has proven that PSVR can be a great platform for first-person shooters, and Supermassive Games is hoping *Bravo Team* can become the next step forward in realising that vision. Set in a fictional city, *Bravo Team* has been developed with both solo and co-op in mind, with the game scaling as you push forward through intense firefights with a friend; utilising spotting, suppression and communication to survive.



NO HEROES ALLOWED

FORMAT: **PSVR** | DEVELOPER: **ACQUIRE** | RELEASE: **2018**

Following in the footsteps of *Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do To Deserve This?*, and its sequel *What Did I Do To Deserve This, My Lord? 2*, Acquire is taking yet another stab at getting this quirky strategy game off of the ground in the west. Using VR, you'll be able to become the god of destruction – casting your eyes (and hands) over a tabletop, diorama style, world – using your powers to fight heroes, destroy enemies and cast your influence across the land.



LEARNING FROM FEEDBACK

In many ways, *Forza Motorsport 7* is a direct response to the feedback Turn 10 received over the last two Xbox One releases, and the results are staggering. The game will feature over 700 cars at launch, a notable improvement over the 450 available in *Motorsport 6*, while the 30 available tracks will also include close to 200 different configurations, allowing players the opportunity to tweak the available locations to find their optimal racing experience.

DRIVING WITH CHARACTER

The focus on detail and realism extends out of the cars, physics and tracks this time out, reaching the avatar behind the wheel. Turn 10 wants to bring more character to *Forza Motorsport 7* as it introduces customisable characters for the first time. It features both female and male body types, along with over 300 4K asset designs, building an enviable catalogue of helmets, gloves racing suits, and more, with over a week of work going into each and every one of them.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

While the focus has obviously been on making *Forza 7* run and look like no racing game before it, Turn 10 has also eagerly put in the hours to emphasise the realism across its beautiful car models. Seeing *Forza 7* running in 4K is something special, with the wires and mirrors inside of the vehicles shaking and vibrating in response to bumps on the tarmac and trips into the barriers – listen, *Forza 7* is still hard – while the windshield wipers will rattle in response to clearing elements at 130mph.



FORZA MOTORSPORT 7 IS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE RACING GAME EVER MADE

HERE'S THAT XBOX ONE X SYSTEM SELLER YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT**
DEVELOPER: **TURN 10** | RELEASE: **3 OCT 2017**

Forza has always been synonymous with power and performance, and it was always going to be this latest iteration that would shoulder the responsibility of demonstrating the true appeal of Microsoft's upcoming Xbox One X. Developed alongside the ultra-powerful system, *Forza Motorsport 7* is a beautiful monster designed to bring an entire generation of gamers into a crisp 4K-enhanced future. It's honestly a little arresting; Xbox One owners have had three years to come to terms with the limitations of the system, but this release from Turn 10 will make you forget them in an instant.

But how has Forza Motorsport been able to enjoy such consistent growth across every one of its iterations? Turn 10 credits this to the partnership it has with UK's Playground Studios, responsible for the Forza Horizon series that launches on the Motorsport off years. It has meant the teams are able to share knowledge, accelerate the development of new features and improve on core systems without impeding on direct development. This means that greater customisation, smooth 4K/60FPS, HDR-infused gameplay and, yes, dynamic weather, is coming to *Forza Motorsport 7*.

The results speak for themselves. While the Motorsport games have always existed in a niche of their own, Turn 10 has worked to make sure that *Forza 7* is its most accessible title to date; still perfectly primed for the hardcore, but designed in such a way that everything from assists, handling and racing condition parameters can be tweaked to suit your proficiency. If you're picking up an Xbox One X this November, you'll want to make sure *Forza Motorsport 7* is part of the package.

"THANKS TO XBOX ONE X, FORZA MOTORSPORT 7 RUNS AT NATIVE 4K AND A ROCK-SOLID 60 FRAMES PER SECOND"
DAN GREENAWALT, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, TURN 10

RAIN OR SHINE

Forza Horizon has always excelled in one area over its older sibling, and that's in its presentation of its world and environmental effects. While *Forza 6* introduced weather and night, they were contained to specific modes. That's no longer the case as *Forza 7 finally* brings a dynamic weather system that changes the parameters and conditions of races as they happen. Puddles form in real-time, the track gets muddy as cars struggle to run racing lines, and clouds roll across the horizon as you drive; it's all very beautiful and *very* impressive.



THE BEST PORTABLE **FIFA** EVER?

SWITCH VERSION IMPRESSES DESPITE ITS LIMITATIONS

FORMAT: **SWITCH** | 4K: **NO** | PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS** | DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA** | RELEASE: **2017**

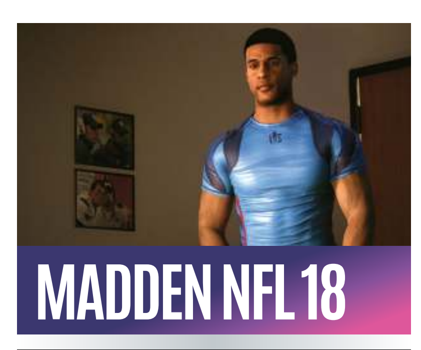
FIFA games have had a habit of becoming hamstrung by generational leaps in the past. Once we heard that the game's debut on the Nintendo Switch wouldn't be running on the Frostbite engine (nor the now abandoned Ignite) we began to fear the worst, but it seems EA Canada still has a few tricks up its sleeve.

Running on a custom-built engine for Switch, *FIFA 18* is already looking like the very best portable FIFA game to date; bringing a full FIFA gameplay experience to those who like to play on the move, including the vast majority of the latest iterations to the mechanics and systems seen in the Xbox One and PS4 versions, and, thankfully, the core Ultimate Team experience. Yes, that means you can open FUT packs on a plane, should you be willing to pay through the nose for the Wi-Fi.

That also means you can expect that silky-smooth 60fps FIFA experience on Switch, including the overhauled crossing system and new hard tackle, introduced to bring more variety and opportunity to those that like to dutifully work the ball through midfield. Are we sad The Journey and updated crowds aren't coming to *FIFA 18* on Switch? Sure, but it feels like a concession made in earnest when we are receiving such a faithful rendition of the core game experience.



"WE BEGAN TO FEAR THE WORST, BUT IT SEEMS EA CANADA STILL HAS A FEW TRICKS UP ITS SLEEVE"



MADDEN NFL 18

FROSTBITE COMES TO AMERICAN FOOTBALL

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE** | 4K: **YES**
PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS** | DEVELOPER: **EA TIBURON**
RELEASE: **25 AUG 2017**

Set to be the most significant update to the Madden franchise in years, *Madden NFL 18* is undergoing a serious transformation. As the first game in the series to utilise EA's Frostbite engine, it'll see an array of changes and updates that were reserved for FIFA in 2016 – in fact, EA is calling it its "most photo-realistic game to date". But that isn't where the true excitement lies. Instead that's reserved for Longshot, Madden's first ever attempt at a playable story mode; tracking quarterback Devin Wade as he pushes up through the ranks, from high-school games to one day hearing his name called on NFL draft day.

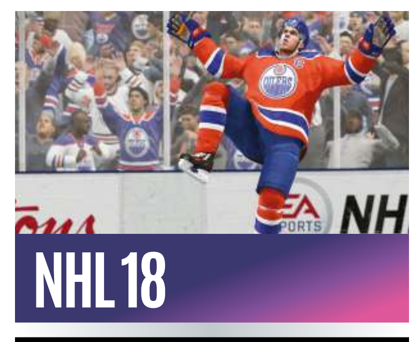


NBA LIVE 18

BEATING THE BUZZER

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE** | 4K: **TBC**
PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS** | DEVELOPER: **EA TIBURON**
RELEASE: **TBC**

EA knows that it can't mess this up, again. The series' last attempt at resurrection was something of a failure, with 2015's *NBA Live 16* not only failing to match *NBA 2K* in terms of playability, but missing basic and vital features such as a practice mode. This, we can only hope, is all set to change with *NBA Live 18*. EA is showing a huge commitment to getting NBA Live back into shape, putting a big focus back onto the smallest details, such as dribbling and enhanced player data, all-new signature player styles and a large array of new moves and shot types. Will the studio pull it off? A demo will be landing this August, so we won't have long to find out.



NHL 18

REFLECTING THE GAME

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE** | 4K: **TBC**
PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS** | DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
RELEASE: **15 SEPTEMBER 2017**

EA Canada has been making steady progress with the NHL series since the turn of the generation and this year's iteration is looking to be the most notable update yet, giving us the tools to be as creative, intuitive and speedy on the ice as possible – reflecting the change of play and style in real ice hockey. An expanded roster of players and teams, more multiplayer modes than ever before, a refined skill system, and, integrally, the return of a three-on-three arcade mode should make *NHL 18* one of EA's best sports titles for the year. Three-on-three has been a feature long missed by hardcore and casual players alike.



FIFA 18

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES**
PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS** | DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
RELEASE: **29 SEPTEMBER 2017**

This year, EA is really taking advantage of the power of Frostbite. While the focus is invariably on the near photo-realistic player models, huge updates to the quality and variety of crowds, and an all-new season of The Journey, there's a lot happening behind the scenes. *FIFA 18* is overhauling animations in an effort to give you more control over players – drawing a new animation every frame, as opposed to one every step – as well as introducing a live substitution mode that will allow you to sub players without trawling through menus. When combined with the new hard tackle system and improved crossing, *FIFA 18* is one of the freshest iterations in years.



PES 2018

REALISM CLASHES WITH REALITY

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
RELEASE: **12 SEPTEMBER 2017**

While FIFA continues its embrace of the pantomime side to the beautiful game – pouring resources into updating The Journey and its visuals – PES is back once again to focus on the minutiae of the play itself. Konami has already done a stunning job bringing this series back to the fore, and this year's edition already looks fantastic as it brings a more realistic game speed into play, joining an improved dribbling and spot kick system, an updated Master League and more opportunities to join up with friends online in co-op. What it still doesn't have, however, is the all-important licences, although Konami promises "good news" on that front to be discussed at Gamescom in August.



EVERYBODY'S GOLF

IT'S TIME TO GET BACK ON THE FAIRWAY

FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **NO**
PUBLISHER: **SONY** | DEVELOPER: **JAPAN STUDIO**
RELEASE: **30 AUG 2017**

Everybody's Golf is returning for another round and it's looking better than ever. As one of Sony's longest-running game franchises – joining Gran Turismo as one of the only to appear on every piece of PlayStation hardware – *Everybody's Golf* is showcasing a number of small upgrades to make the game more fun and inclusive. You can create and customise your own golfer; jump into a golf kart and explore the free-roaming courses; and play new mini-games such as fishing. With the realistic flair of EA's PGA Tour games, this game manages to find a balance between cutesey style and involving gameplay.





ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS SEES THE BLACK FLAG TEAM TAKE TO A BRAVE NEW WORLD

THE REINVENTION ASSASSIN'S CREED DESPERATELY NEEDED?

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PS4, PC** | RELEASE: **27 OCTOBER 2017** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL**

Change wasn't just necessary, it was inevitable. After a decade of dutiful iteration, Ubisoft is finally taking its most influential and important series back to its roots. It's an opportunity to establish the origins of the Brotherhood Of Assassins, leaving many of the organisation's most laboured traditions and most frustrating concessions on the cutting room floor. *Assassin's Creed Origins* isn't a reboot *per se*, but it *is* a re-invention – that's a distinction game director Ashraf Ismail is quick to make, but we are still eager to challenge. "*Assassin's Creed Origins* is a re-invention of the foundations of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise," says Ismail, who also led the development team on *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. "A brand-new vision that further pushes exploration, narration, combat and progression."

The 're-inventions' in *Origins* range from incidental to game changing, weaving through each and every one of *Assassin's Creed*'s ageing core gameplay mechanics and systems – but the heart of it all is still there. It's still a science-fiction game that uses history as its playground; while no confirmation could be made either way, it looks as if the ineffectual modern day storyline remains, but even that's easy enough to stomach because, yes, both naval combat and tomb raiding are making a return. Ubisoft Montreal is caught here between wanting to offer something fresh and needing to deliver something familiar to the millions of fans that have had to wait an extra year to get their fill of assassin action.

The 'fresh' refers to a focus shift for the series, from action-adventure to action-RPG. With that conceit has come a radical redesign to combat, the intertwining of narrative and exploration and an alteration to the way in which you will interact with – and progress through – *Assassin's Creed*'s new sprawling, exotic, Egyptian open world. Whether the studio wants to admit it or not, *Origins* feels like a very direct and confident response to the criticism that has been levied at the series across the years – which did, of course, spill over in a somewhat spectacular fashion following the release of the much-maligned *AC: Unity* at the dawn of the generation.

Counteracting the rising tide of discontent with *Origins* has meant allowing for more incubation time than any *Assassin's Creed* before it. Ubisoft Montreal has been hard at work on the title since early 2014, beginning shortly after the completion of Black Flag. It's the sort of lead-time that affords a development team some much-needed space for reflection. "Very early on we knew that to fill a world of this size and scope with meaningful life – narratively and in terms of gameplay – we had to approach the challenge from a new perspective," continues Ismail, noting that everything, from the AI framework and NPC design, to its aspirations around mission design and combat mechanics, has been completely overhauled in an effort to support your new-found autonomy within this genuinely impressive landmass. "We wanted the freedom to tell many stories through memorable characters and to allow players the ability to engage in the intricacies of this world at their own pace."

It's here that one of the most welcomed changes rears its head. *Origins* is ditching »

> "ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS IS A RE-INVENTION OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE ASSASSIN'S CREED FRANCHISE."
> ASHRAF ISMAIL, GAME DIRECTOR, UBISOFT MONTREAL

TOMB RAIDER

This is undoubtedly one of the biggest and richest environments to ever come to an *Assassin's Creed* game, and those who like to explore will find it littered with secrets and treasures to find. You'll want to focus on levelling up first, though, as some tombs will be guarded by ancient enemies and monsters.



BAYEK'S INTRODUCTION

The lead protagonist of *Assassin's Creed Origins* is Bayek, and it's his journey that will lead to the formation of the Assassins Brotherhood. A native of Siwa, a remote oasis near the Egyptian-Libyan border, Bayek is descendent of a long line of ancient warriors called the Medjay – certainly the precursors to the Assassins.

EAGLE VISION

Given that this is set some thousand years in the past, many of the established powers won't be available. Eagle Vision is one such, replaced by Bayek's natural affinity with nature. You can take command of his eagle, Senu, to gain a unique view of the world, spotting missions and targeting enemies from above.

COMBAT EVOLVED

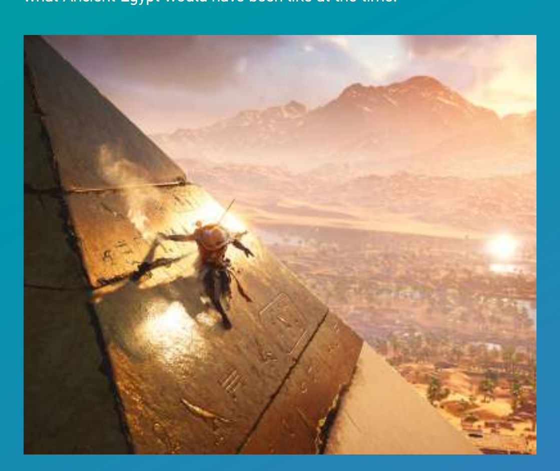
Fighting enemies has been significantly overhauled in *Origins*, giving you more scope to tailor Bayek into your perfect assassin. You'll also be able to transition seamlessly between ranged and melee weapons, useful as you'll now need to attack and defend against multiple enemies at once.

Origins will run in native 4K on Xbox One X, and will undoubtedly be one of the biggest launch titles.

LAND OF THE PHARAOHS
EGYPT IS MORE THAN SAND AND PYRAMIDS

Ubisoft has always tried to make *Assassin's Creed*'s locations, and the personnel that inhabit them, as historically accurate as possible. Obviously concessions have to be made, but for the most part the team treats its games as postcards from the past. Egypt presents something of a problem, then, because, as Ismail tells it, so much of this era is simply unrecorded. "One of the other big differences from previous *Assassin's Creed* games is that we go much further back in time than in previous instalments. So we had to work very closely with historians and Egyptian experts to help us fill in the gaps of Egyptian life not easily found in history books."

This means the Ubisoft Montreal team enjoys far more creative freedom with this locale, which it describes as "not only massive" but also "more diverse than any other setting we created in the past." The results are stunning, but it'll be interesting to see how the team handles an environment when it has license to go off-book. "For some elements, this lack of reference also challenged us to create and illustrate parts of Ancient Egypt," continues Ismail, "rather than re-create known history as we did with past games. For this we heavily relied on the amazing work done by our Art team to really capture the look and overall feel of what Ancient Egypt would have been like at the time."



the laboured, regimented mission design of old, opting instead for a quest-based structure to guide its narrative forward. "This means that players will pick up multiple quests, have them all be available simultaneously, and decide their order and priority. This gives autonomy to players while giving us an opportunity to tell hundreds of Egypt's stories."

This is important, although not because the stories are necessarily more elaborate than what we've experienced in *Assassin's Creed* before. What we've seen of the game in action so far seems to suggest that missions, while more open, are still variations on 'locate a target and loot/kill it in a fashion that won't see you desynchronised.' But giving us the opportunity to pick and prioritise the missions we enjoy completing only serves the larger goal of *Origins* – giving us greater scope to revel in the world design. Ubisoft Montreal wants to give you more control over the *Assassin's Creed* experience, breaking out of the formulaic designs of the past and letting you really live and breathe the experience of being an assassin.

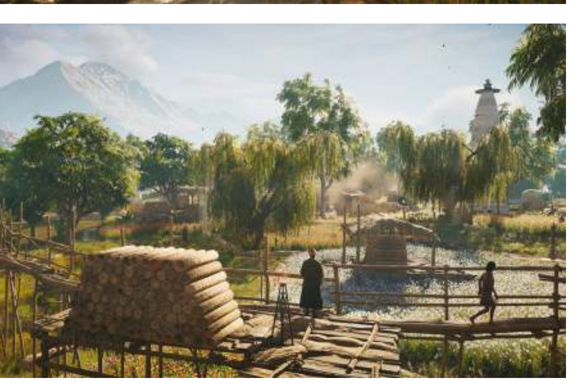
Much of this is coming through in *Assassin's Creed*'s embrace of the action-RPG model. Combat (and everything that comes from it) is perhaps the biggest proof of this idea, with Ubisoft Montreal finally taking steps to answer the biggest piece of criticism levied against the series over the decade. "Based on this new action-RPG direction, we completely redesigned the combat system," teases Ismail. "We changed the paradigm of combat, building from the ground up a new versatile, highly-reactive and fast-paced combat system that gives control, depth and freedom to players, bringing more challenges and thrill to combat," he continues, noting that everything from the character's positioning to the size and speed of their weapon, will factor into how successful you are in a scrap with the various enemies of Egypt circa 49BCE.

> "ALL OF THE ASSASSIN'S CREED PROPERTIES, THE FILM, GAMES, COMICS AND NOVELS, HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN ORIGINS' STORYLINE."
> ASHRAF ISMAIL, GAME DIRECTOR, UBISOFT MONTREAL

If that wasn't enough, your enemy combatants will no longer sit back and wait to be countered into decapitation. Instead, you'll find foes to be far more aggressive, eager to kill you as quickly as possible. You'll actually need to engage in sword fighting; right bumper for a light attack and right trigger for heavy, with the left trigger pulling up your shield to block attack and deliver a well-timed parry. Combat is all hit-boxes and positioning now; there's no warping to the feet of an enemy combatant with the tap of the X button, no more stilted animations or button mash tactics to engage in. Sword fighting feels like something the developer wants you to engage in, rather than it simply being a means to a bloody end.

"This new paradigm also translates to the RPG dimension of the experience," Ismail




continues, giving us a hint as to how the change to the combat system has bled out into other immediate areas of the game. "Not only do weapons differ in size and speed, they also come with their own specific statistics, attributes and rarity levels, from Common to Legendary. A Legendary Hunter Bow will be much deadlier than a common one and might have some special abilities, such as a better chance of critical hit. All those changes contribute to the same goal: to give players control, depth and freedom in the way they fight for a thrilling and challenging combat experience."

"[The] action-RPG elements support finding weapons with different rarities, levels, stats and visuals, [ensuring] each unique weapon impacts gameplay appropriately. How your character's overall level compares to the ones of enemies is a key factor in the experience. As a player, you now have to carefully consider and choose what are the abilities, gear and crafting decisions that define your Assassin."

The studio might be increasing the complexity of the *Assassin's Creed* experience, but it is doing so in an effort to give you more control – letting you build towards your own playstyle as opposed to wrestling with the game's systems to actually play how you want to. Progression has been completely overhauled, impacting what missions you can take on and which enemies you can stand a chance of defeating – there are even legendary creatures and foes to find out in the world, such as giant snakes, guarding special loot should you be sufficiently geared.

"A player's level and how it compares to the enemies' one is fundamental in the experience, as it will be very difficult for players to kill opponents that are several levels above them. Levelling up not only makes your Assassin stronger, it also grants Ability points that can be spent to obtain a specific capacity, such as more precise aiming with their bow or being able to poison dead bodies," Ismail says, noting that there are three main branches to the ability tree, and specialisation is integral to get the most out of stealth, melee combat and environmental mastery – though keeping on top of *Origins*' full crafting system is also essential to survival and progression.

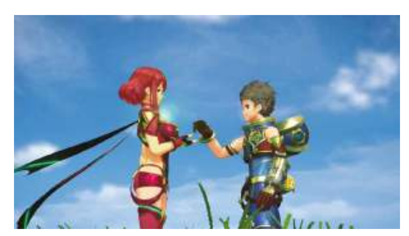
All this comes together to create an experience that feels classically *Assassin's Creed* in spirit, but renewed at heart. It seems as if Ubisoft has finally looked outside of itself and taken note of the innovations made in the open world space by its most immediate competition. Whether this is doing enough to bring lapsed players back to the Animus remains to be seen, but given the spiralling trajectory the series has been on for some time now, *Origins* feels like a bold step to restore some faith in the Brotherhood.

TIME-SINK ADVENTURE GAMES



NI NO KUNI II: REVENANT KINGDOM

■ While it may be lacking the input or expertise of Studio Ghibli, there's still a lot to get excited by in this *Ni No Kuni* sequel. Developer Level-5 is looking to fix the two biggest issues of the problem by making a drastic overhaul to the battle system and streamlining the story.



XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 2

■ If you thought the world of *Breath Of The Wild* was impressive running on Switch, just wait until you get a piece of *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*. Coming from Monolith, it's destined to impress with the scale of its fantasy-meets-science-fiction world alone. A game full of boundless adventure and exploration.



YAKUZA 6: THE SONG OF LIFE

■ Powered by a new engine, offering up new locales, and promising to take Kazuma Kiryu on the next stage of his mission through the underbelly of Tokyo's Kamurocho district, *Yakuza 6* is the latest entry into the long-running franchise. It's almost certainly going to be a must-play for anyone who enjoyed the drama of this year's *Yakuza 0*.



VAMPYR

■ It's taken a little while but Dontnod Entertainment's *Vampyr* is finally beginning to deliver on its promise and potential. Featuring a gorgeous, interwoven interpretation of London circa-1918, not to mention some wild vampyric combat and movement mechanisms, it's coming together as one of 2017's most unique adventure games.



MISSING IN ACTION

THE GAMES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT WE DIDN'T GET TO SEE AT E3 2017

We've not exactly struggled to compile our celebration of new games this year, but even so there were a handful of pretty massive titles that we had expected to see more of or get announcements on that simply didn't appear at E3 this year. The most conspicuously absent was Naughty Dog's **[1]** ***The Last Of Us: Part II***. Despite being announced last year, the return of Ellie and Joel was set aside, perhaps indicating that we shouldn't expect it in the next 12 months or so.

"Believe me, we're super excited to show you more of Ellie and Joel's second journey, but right now it's Chloe and Nadine's time to shine," creative director Neil Druckmann tweeted in reference to the greater prominence of *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* in Sony's E3 week.

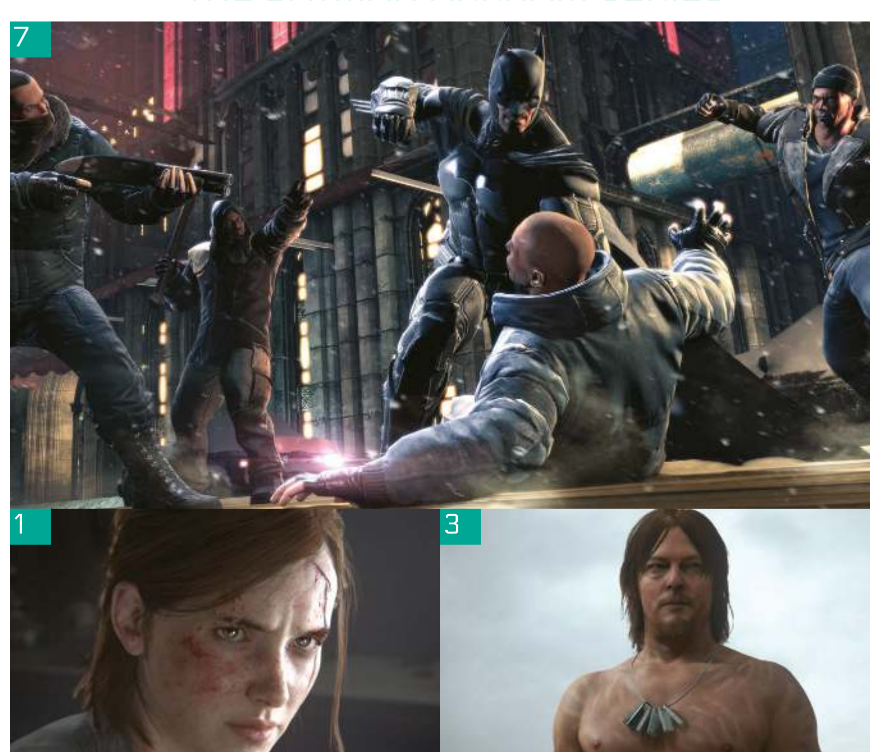
But there were a few other missing games, such as **[2]** ***Dreams*** from Media Molecule, which itself tweeted out assurances development was still in progress and it would have more to share later this year, perhaps holding off for another PSX event. Likewise we didn't get anything new from **[3]** ***Death Stranding***, Kojima Production likely to be getting deep into production at this point having chosen Guerrilla Games' Decima engine to work on. And no update on **[4]** ***Shenmue III*** or **[5]** ***Final Fantasy VII Remake***, both of which had been revealed at E3 two years earlier.

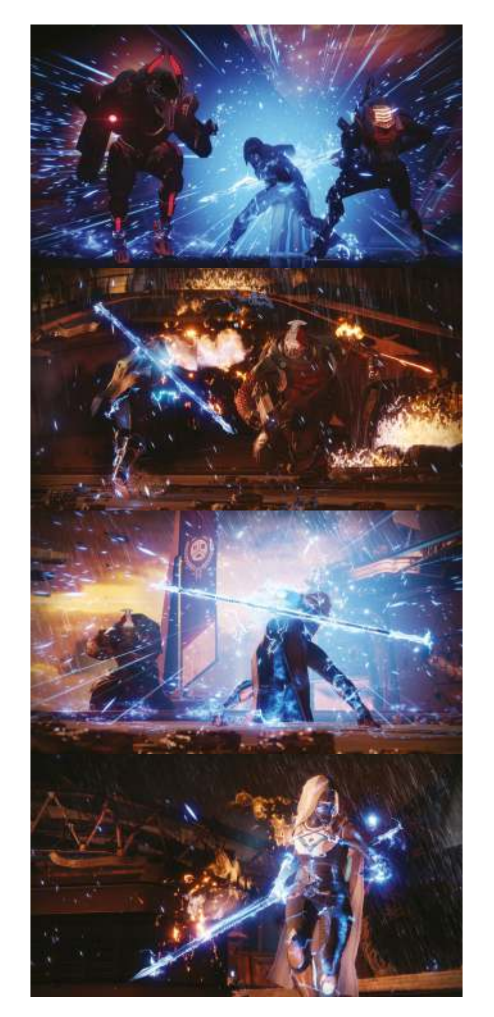
But that was just the games we already knew about; there were plenty of rumours swirling before E3 that seemed plausible, but didn't pay out. For instance, sticking with Sony for a moment longer, there was talk of a new FromSoftware exclusive, possibly even **[6]** ***Bloodborne 2***. We were also hearing rumours of a return for Warner Bros Montréal to the **[7] Batman Arkham** series with the Court Of Owls playing a role. Additionally, Gearbox has been talking fairly openly about a return to **[8] Borderlands**, but that too seemingly wasn't ready to reveal. Perhaps we can expect more from all of these titles at Gamescom or another show later this year.

One developer who apologised for not showing up at E3 was Devil May Cry and **[9]** ***Dragon's Dogma*** director Hideaki Itsuno whose latest game was intended for announcement this year, but missed out on a big reveal in LA. No word yet on exactly what he's been cooking up, but the pedigree speaks for itself.

Speaking of pedigree, we had hoped that EA might have more to say about the Star Wars projects being headed up by **[10] Visceral** and Respawn this year, but both had to step aside for a greater emphasis on *Battlefront II*.

"WE WERE ALSO HEARING RUMOURS OF A RETURN FOR WARNER BROS MONTREAL TO THE BATMAN ARKHAM SERIES"





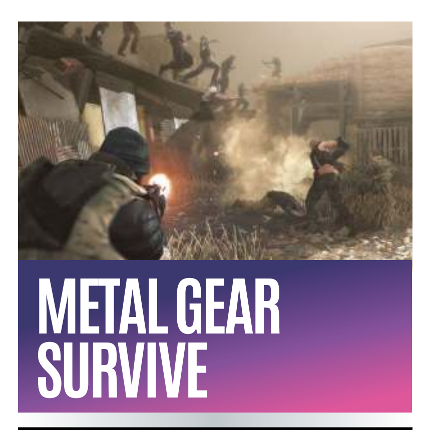


DESTINY 2 IS A NEW BEGINNING

FORGET WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT BUNGIE'S SHOOTER

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | RELEASE: **6 SEPTEMBER 2017** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION** | DEVELOPER: **BUNGIE**

Bungie is completely overhauling *Destiny.* It doesn't matter whether you've invested hundreds of hours over the last two years or have been sat on the sidelines, curious but put off by the initial wave of disappointment, because *Destiny 2* is a completely blank slate. With its revised class structures and abilities, new weapons slots and firearms, a protagonist and a story that actually seem to make a degree of sense, along with some of the most intuitive social systems we've ever seen in a console game, *Destiny 2* seems to have it all. In truth, Bungie has learned a lot of lessons through the various iterations of *Destiny*, and this full sequel is looking to answer as many of the criticisms and concerns put to the studio over the years, while still delivering more of the super-tight and monstrously enjoyable shooter action that has enthralled millions of players. With the PC edition already playing beautifully – *Destiny 2* in 4K at 60fps is a thing to worship – and the console version offering a refined take on more of the same, *Destiny 2* is already coming together as this year's must-buy shooter experience. It'll be better with friends, but fun is still viable without.

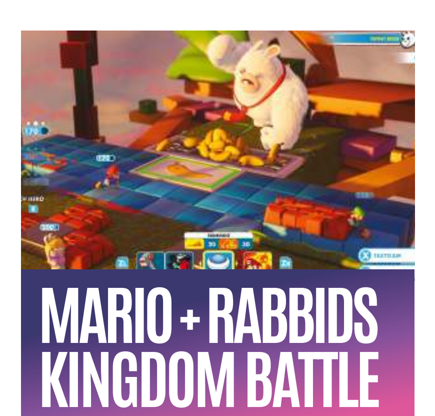


METAL GEAR SURVIVE

IS THERE REALLY LIFE AFTER KOJIMA?

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC, PS4** | 4K: **TBC** | RELEASE: **22 SEP**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**

The latest Metal Gear game will come with a single player campaign, but it was the multiplayer mode that got an airing at E3 this year. Stealth may be a key pillar of the series, but the multiplayer action descends into a rote third-person shooter template. Expect side-missions in between waves (such as dispatching roving bands of zombies) to unlock ammo boxes and more.



MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE

X-COM GOES CUTE IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED CROSSOVER EVER

FORMAT: **SWITCH** | RELEASE: **29 AUG**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | 4K: **NO**

This Switch exclusive takes the tactical, turn-based combat of the X-COM series, drenches it with the colour and locales of the Mushroom Kingdom, and somehow retains a final product that's both nuanced and deep. Moving around arenas using cover is the dish of the day, with special moves and a pipe system for moving Rabbids around the battlefield.



MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR

YOU ONLY GET ONE SHOT, DO NOT MISS YOUR CHANCE TO BLOW

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PS4, PC** | RELEASE: **10 OCT**
PUBLISHER: **WARNER BROS** | DEVELOPER: **MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS** | 4K: **YES**

The sequel to 2014's Nemesis-driven *Shadow Of Mordor* is doubling down on everything that made the it great. This huge interactive tapestry morphs with your every decision. Enemies thought dead can try and assassinate you out of nowhere, while once bitter foes will guard your life with theirs. We can't wait to take Nemesis 2.0 for a spin.



IS SKULL & BONES THE PIRATE GAME WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED?

BORN OUT OF BLACK FLAG

FORMAT: **PC, PS4, XBOX ONE** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT SINGAPORE** | RELEASE: **Q3 2018**

Skull & Bones is the game that our team has dreamed of building ever since we first set sail singing along to sea shanties and we are excited to finally share our vision," said Justin Arden Farren, creative director on Ubisoft's latest attempt to inject new life into the online multiplayer sphere. Farren is excited for good reason, it's taken nearly four years to make this game a reality. Ubisoft Singapore, perhaps best known for specialising in the ocean and water technology that can be seen across many of the *Assassin's Creed* games, first put this experimental experience into gestation right after the launch of 2013's *Black Flag*; it wanted to take its beloved naval combat and see what it would be like with two player captains running riot across the Indian ocean.

The result is *Skull & Bones*, a ship-to-ship combat game that takes the most celebrated aspect of *Black Flag* and doubles down on it. It's an opportunity for you to take command of your own ships, customise them, and take them out onto the open seas to do battle with both AI and real-player fleets for treasures and loot. The basic rules of engagement are essentially



those of *Black Flag*'s, albeit with a heavier focus of positioning and navigation. Wind is the tactical layer to the experience, forcing you to change tactics and lines of sight on the fly, constantly readjusting your position to better suit the conditions flowing through the systemic, reactive open world that is the playground for these vast multiplayer engagements.

In action, *Skull & Bones* plays like a refined, simplified, *World Of Warships*, albeit one viewed through a highly cinematic lens. Ubisoft may never give us the full pirate game experience we've spent years dreaming of, but *Skull & Bones* may indeed be the next best thing.







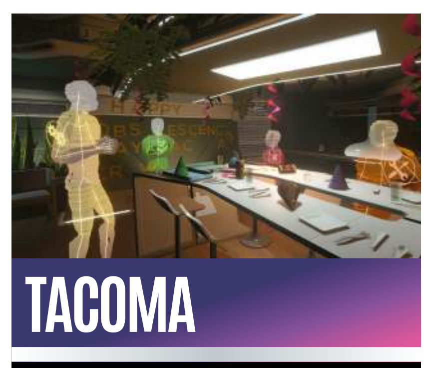
WARGROOVE

CHUCKLEFISH HARNESSES THE POWER OF TRADITIONAL TURN-BASED STRATEGY

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, SWITCH PC** | 4K: **TBC**
PUBLISHER: **CHUCKLEFISH** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
RELEASE: **2018**

Bringing a little Nintendo strategy to a new generation of consoles and to PC, Chucklefish continues its run of creating and supporting some fantastic retro-inspired releases, this time channelling the spirit of *Advance Wars* and *Fire Emblem*. *Wargroove* has all the makings of some classic 2D action with its array of unit types and deep tactical play, but the real selling point is the map creator.

Thanks to its simplicity of design, you can make some pretty intense maps to challenge yourself and other players with in just a couple of minutes. There will be plenty of maps already and likely a bunch of community maps created by the development team and it can be enjoyed in local and online multiplayer to boot.



TACOMA

A GAME ABOUT SPACE

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES**
PUBLISHER: **FULLBRIGHT** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
RELEASE: **2 AUG 2017**

While the shorthand of describing *Tacoma* as *Gone Home*-in-space might be a pretty succinct way of describing Fullbright's latest, it also comes across as a little reductive. In actuality, *Tacoma* is about more than just relocating the emergent storytelling experience and actually about doubling down on its core ideas and embellishing it with brand new mechanics.

Where *Gone Home* left you to wander an empty house and gradually become engrossed by the fragments of the lives that left it behind, *Tacoma* gives you snippets of the lives of its crew and shows you their connections. It's about the space between people as much as the space outside, if you'll allow us to get all poetic on you for a moment.

AN UNCHARTED STORY UNCOVERED IN **THE LOST LEGACY**

THIS NAUGHTY DOG SPIN-OFF IS EVERY BIT UP TO THE TASK

FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY** | DEVELOPER: **NAUGHTY DOG** | RELEASE: **22 AUGUST 2017**



A NEW ADVENTURE

1 Hidden deep in the mountains of India, a new adventure is waiting to be uncovered. This August, it'll be yours to find, as you take fan-favourite archaeologist Chloe Frazer and vicious mercenary Nadine Ross off in search of treasure and tribulations in *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* – a spin-off set after the conclusion of *Uncharted 4*. There's no Nathan Drake, no Sully, and nobody coming to your aid this time around; *The Lost Legacy* is going to be one of the most explosive and testing quests to ever grace the *Uncharted* series.



IT'S VERY FAMILIAR

2 After being wrongly classified as standalone DLC for the better part of a year, it turns out there's so much more to *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* than we had previously anticipated. It's hitting all of the *Uncharted* beats; brutal shootouts, ridiculous puzzles, charismatic leads, dank tombs, and a pretty crazy array of crumbling platforms – what more could you ask for? *The Lost Legacy* looks like your typical Uncharted experience, only this one is coming in at a far tighter ten-hour mark and at a reduced price of £30.



AN EXPANDED SCOPE

3 In spite of its familiarity, Naughty Dog is actually expanding out the scope of the typical Drake adventure, drawing on its experience developing *Uncharted 4*. The Madagascar level has, in particular, been singled out by the studio in terms of what we should expect for scenes of large-scale cinematically driven action in *The Lost Legacy*. A 'wide-linear' space, it essentially means that levels – while linear in structure – are still fairly open, giving you the opportunity to tackle objectives and enemies with more nuance and tactical variety – such as making use of Chloe's array of silent weaponry, for example.

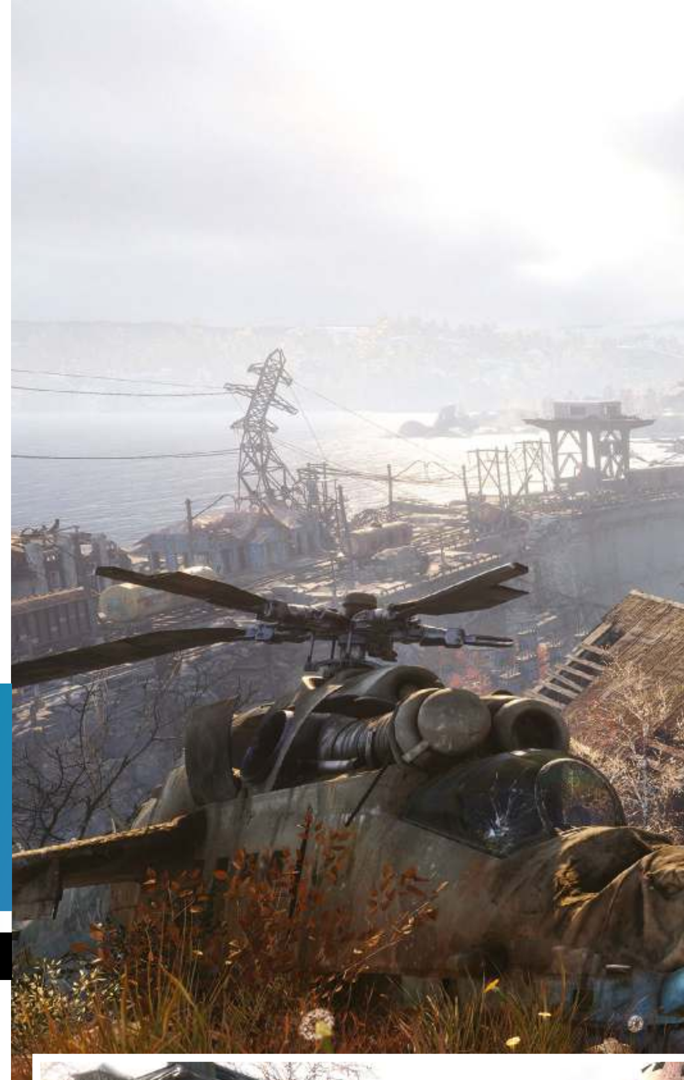


A DIFFERENT MYTHOLOGY

4 While the *Uncharted* games have always been rooted in mythology, *The Lost Legacy* is looking to a different kind as it builds its adventure firmly rooted in India. Naughty Dog has taken inspiration from Hinduism and the mythology closely tied to Indian culture that, the studio states, gives *The Lost Legacy* a different feel to any *Uncharted* game that has come before it. We've already seen this reflected in the types of ancient tombs the combative duo are venturing through, though we get the impression we are still yet to see the best in action – *Uncharted* is renowned for having mad puzzles tied to gorgeous tombs, *Lost Legacy* will be no different.




By mixing linear spaces with more open environments, 4A Games is hoping to capture the spirit of STALKER in its latest release.



METRO EXODUS IS A BOLD NEW BEGINNING

OUT OF THE DARKNESS AND INTO THE WILDS

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PS4, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **DEEP SILVER** | DEVELOPER: **4A GAMES** | RELEASE: **2018**

For developer 4A Games, *Metro: Exodus* is all about leaning on the past to build a better future. At its core, the studio is comprised of ex GSC Game World staff, those responsible for *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*. In this long-awaited sequel, the team wants to create something of a best of, bringing the defining elements from both of the Metro games together with the sprawling scale and ambition of *Shadow Of Chernobyl*. It's quite the challenge, but the earliest showing of *Exodus* has instilled us with confidence.

The Metro games were always known for their ability to create claustrophobic tension, for seeing series lead Artyom desperately trying to survive abandoned Russian transit lines while battling against mutated monstrosities and an ever-dwindling amount of supplies. In *Exodus*, we are finally spending more time on the surface, working to escape an irradiated Moscow for pastures new. This means that a shift to the expected pace and gameplay of *Metro*: larger areas, filled with new dangers, are coming, alongside the traditional linear environments we've come to expect from the series.

The initial reveal hinted towards *Metro* making the shift towards an open world, but this isn't necessarily the case. 4A is quick to describe *Exodus* as leaning on 'sandbox survival', and it's this fusion of linear and larger environments that help give Exodus such a distinct *STALKER* feel. It's going to work in a way that isn't that dissimilar to *STALKER*'s design, the second coming of The Zone, which was made up of 18 different maps – progression between them gated by loading screens. *Exodus* will work much in the same way, with Artyom transitioning between the dank tunnels and sprawling wilderness of Moscow as he looks to make his escape. These areas are set to be the largest 4A has ever created, dwarfing *Metro: Last Light*'s swamp level by some distance, we're told, which should give series fans some indication as to the studio's scope here.

Interestingly, *Exodus* actually takes place across an entire year, with players finally experiencing something more than a typically frozen Russian winter as they deal with shifting seasons, not to mention enemies that we've only typically dealt with in freezing conditions. During your travels, you'll be able to meet other survivors and recruit them to your mission to move to the East – although not everybody will make it there alive. 4A promises that your decisions will have far-reaching consequences on the direction of the story, built for replayability, and on who of your group – called the Spartan Rangers – survives against *Metro*'s paranormal horrors.



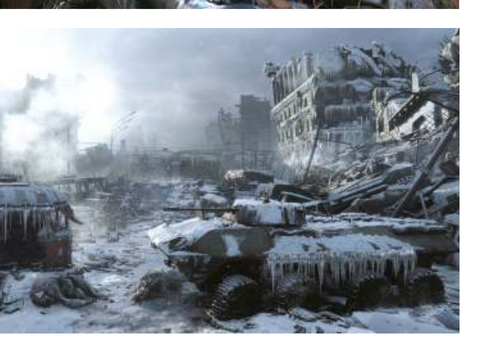




The reveal of Metro Exodus was in-engine, designed to be representative of the final product with a few flourishes thrown in for good measure.

What we are eager to see at this point is whether or not 4A is actually capable of bringing its immersive, linear storytelling and cast it across more open environments. The story being set in the aftermath of *Last Light*'s Redemption ending, we're eager to see the impact of this journey on Artyom, although we're fearful that emphasis could fall away from the survival systems that made the series so entertaining in an effort to emphasise the new dynamic weather system and day-night cycle. Still, with *Exodus* promising to showcase even more weapon customisation, a stronger focus on resource management and new ways for you to keep your gas mask in check against the elements, it seems as if 4A is aware of the challenges ahead of it.

Given that we had essentially resigned ourselves to the fact that *STALKER 2* was never going to happen – development on that died back in 2014 – the promise of *Metro Exodus* has us itching to play. It is, by all accounts, destined to be a true spiritual successor, taking the most popular elements of the STALKER franchise and bringing them together with Metro in spectacular fashion.





WASTELANDS TO UNCOVER



SKYRIM VR

Despite having a teleportation system to aid in navigation and movement, *Skyrim*'s vast and icy wasteland is still one of the coolest VR experiences coming this year. It's empowering and awe-inspiring, the opportunity to explore one of Bethesda's best worlds up-close and personal shouldn't be missed.



DOOM VFR

It should never have worked, but here we are, staring directly into the abyss of hell – and, seemingly, with no motion sickness. *Doom* is fast, it's frantic, and oh boy is it violent, and as it should happen, a perfect fit for VR headsets. So long as the frame rate can stay smooth throughout, this should be a defining VR game of the year.



FALLOUT 4 VR

Largely improved over last year's showing, *Fallout 4* in virtual reality is looking like a real accomplishment for Bethesda. Movement and combat feels intuitive in the space, and it's certainly easy to become immersed in such a bleak and barren landscape. Whether its blandness will begin to grind with time remains to be seen.



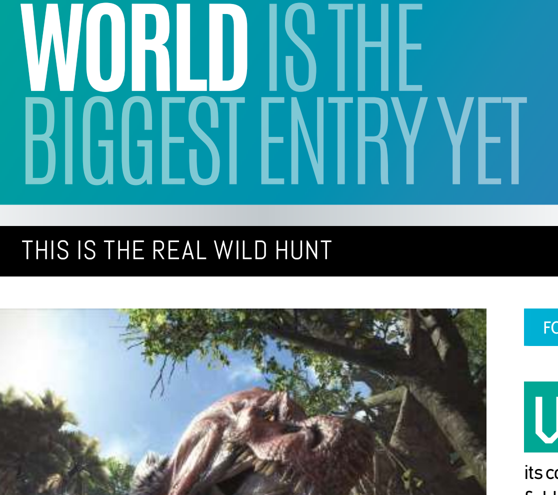
WASTELAND III

The release of *Wasteland III* is going to be bittersweet. On the one hand, we can't wait to delve into the apocalyptically deep RPG from inXile Entertainment, but on the other we're a little sad to learn that it'll likely be creator Brian Fargo's last game. Still, it continues to impress with every showing. This will be one for the ages.



MONSTER HUNTER: WORLD IS THE BIGGEST ENTRY YET

THIS IS THE REAL WILD HUNT



FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | RELEASE: **2018** | 4K: **NO** | PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**

We have little doubt in our mind that *Monster Hunter: World* is going to be one of the biggest games of 2018 – and we mean that in every conceivable sense. While fans have been patiently awaiting the series' leap to the current generation, Capcom has been hard at work making what looks to be the ultimate distillation of its core ideals: the maps are larger, as too are the monsters, and you won't find any pesky loading times breaking up the fields this time. With the introduction of open terrain comes a dynamic ecosystem, with monsters living autonomously in the world – fighting each other and trying to survive in accordance with the pre-established food chain – meaning the tracking and hunting mechanics have seen a suitable upgrade and refresh too.

Other changes include the addition of actual, visible damage numbers, giving you a better indication as to your impact on creatures. There's a more intuitive method of item acquisition and consumption, and some fairly intuitive multiplayer opportunities should you want to go hunting with friends mid-mission. Honestly, once you see this beast in action, you'll wonder how you ever managed with anything else.



RAIDERS OF THE BROKEN PLANET

MERCURYSTEAM GEARS UP FOR LIFE AFTER CASTLEVANIA

FORMAT: **PC, PS4, XBOX ONE** | RELEASE: **TBC** | 4K: **YES**
PUBLISHER: **MERCURYSTEAM** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**

In an age where the likes of *Overwatch* rule the roost, going the way of the asymmetrical shooter isn't exactly a shocker for a new IP in 2017. Featuring both single player and multiplayer modes, *ROTBP* blends big guns, melee combat and *Destiny*-style special moves.

The gunplay looks and feels very familiar, but character movement does at least have a floatier feel, with jumps that can send you leaping away from – or into – danger.

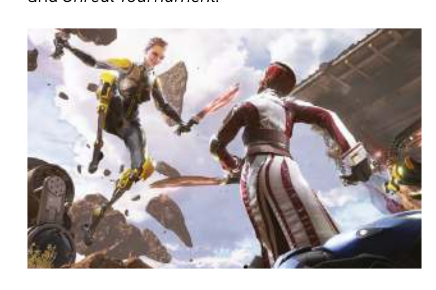
LAWBREAKERS

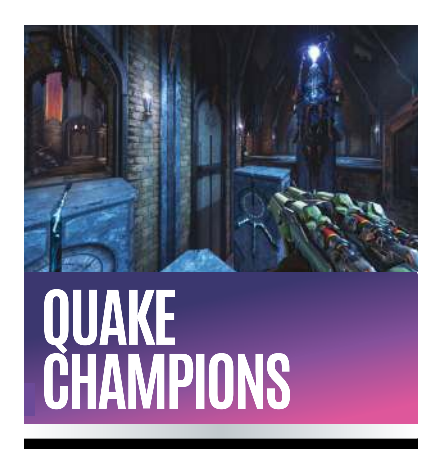
BLESZINSKI'S NEW SHOOTER EMBRACES THE MAD SPEED OF OLD

FORMAT: **PS4, PC** | RELEASE: **8 AUG 2017** | PUBLISHER: **NEXON** | DEVELOPER: **BOSS KEY PRODUCTIONS** | 4K: **YES**

The first game from Cliff Bleszinski's new studio offers all the nuance of a sledgehammer to the jaw. It's a fast-paced, team-based shooter that's all about speed, destruction and over-the-top low-gravity kills.

Despite sitting in the same team-based shooter category as *Overwatch*, *LawBreakers* intentionally does away with 'classic' character types (sniper, tank, healer, etc) and smoothes everything down to facilitate faster gameplay that harks back to old days of *Quake III Arena* and *Unreal Tournament*.





QUAKE CHAMPIONS

THE FREE-TO-PLAY ARENA SHOOTER BLAZKOWICZ'S THE COMPETITION

FORMAT: **PC** | RELEASE: **2017** | PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA**
DEVELOPER: **ID SOFTWARE, SABER INTERACTIVE** | 4K: **YES**

The break-neck FPS features the rebooted *Wolfenstein*'s BJ Blazkowicz as a guest character, and there's been confirmation that classic *Quake* multiplayer maps (will be joining the raft of new arenas for this year's release.

The game's currently in a closed Beta, with a recent E3 update adding in three new maps, the nasty Tri-Bolt weapon and more. Oh, and Bethesda is organising a tournament for later in the year where the winner bags $1,000,000. Who says playing games can't earn you a living, eh?

INDIE GAMES ROUNDUP

THE SMALL WONDERS MAKING A BIG IMPACT



ALTO'S ODYSSEY

FORMAT: **TBC** | DEVELOPER: **SNOWMAN** | RELEASE: **Q3 2017**

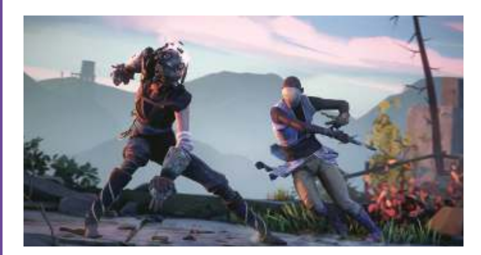
It's fantastic to see that 2015's snowboarding endless runner *Alto's Adventure* is getting a sequel, this time seemingly replacing white peaks with sandy dunes. Snowman's gorgeous mobile and PC game was a quiet triumph, and this small change in setting will likely lead to another beautifully rendered release. It's all about avoiding obstacles, leaping onto rails, wires and roofs, chaining together spins and tricks. It's expected very soon.



GRIFTLANDS

FORMAT: **PC** | DEVELOPER: **KLEI ENTERTAINMENT**
RELEASE: **Q1 2018**

Klei is turning its hand to yet another fantastic-looking adventure, making the kind of interactive cartoon graphics we could only dream of growing up. While Klei hasn't entirely lifted the lid on *Griftlands*, it seems pretty clear that we'll be taking on a turn-based RPG with squad mechanics, that there'll be a conversation and likely choice system built in and that the opportunities to charm, cheat and swindle your way around the game will be plentiful.



ABSOLVER

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **SCLOCLAP**
RELEASE: **29 AUGUST 2017**

This open world, co-op and multiplayer melee combat game has been one of our most hotly anticipated releases for some time, largely due to its combat deck building mechanics and the fluidity of the fighting you can achieve as a result. As you gradually duel opponents, you find companions or even a teacher whose combat style you can then tap into to increase your own abilities. There's an amazing depth to the whole experience.



THE ARTFUL ESCAPE

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **BEETHOVEN & DINOSAUR** | RELEASE: **TBC**

The journey of Francis Vendetti feels like it's been a long one, but thankfully, all this game appears to have lost in recent months is a little bit of its name. The experience itself remains a psychedelic and enchanting one, as your aspiring musician goes on a journey of self-discovery to become the rock icon he believes he can be. The use of music, colour and light in this platformer remains fantastic.



YLANDS

FORMAT: **PC** | DEVELOPER: **BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE**
RELEASE: **TBC**

Coming to Early Access this summer, *Ylands* is an open world survival and crafting experience in a similar vein to *Minecraft*, but the concept here is more extensive, allowing you to create amazing themed experiences, from *Tomb Raider*-like dungeon exploration to Western settlement shootouts. You can switch between first and third person just as in Mojang's trendsetter, but crafting and combat both appear to be much deeper.



OOBLETS

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **GLUMBERLAND**
RELEASE: **TBC 2018**

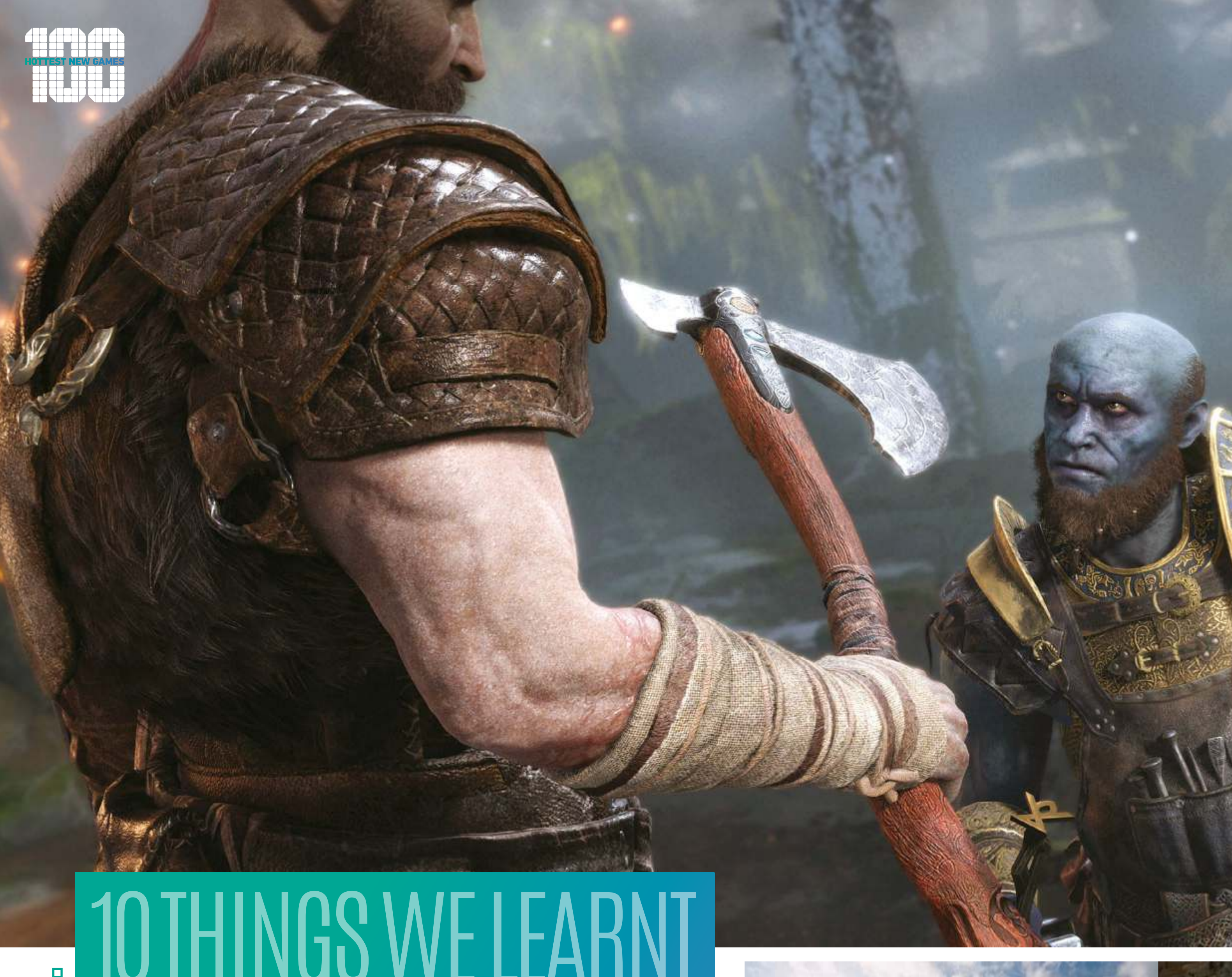
Mixing together elements of *Pokémon*, *Animal Crossing* and *Harvest Moon*, *Ooblets* probably takes the prize for most devastatingly adorable game in recent memory. Plant yourself a garden, raise small creatures, battle them, level them up and explore this strange and colourful world to your heart's content. We're expecting something akin to *Viva Piñata* from this one; a game that appears cute on the outside but has masses of depth to it.



ASHEN

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **AURORA 44**
RELEASE: **30 APRIL 2018**

In the absence of *Fable*, the Xbox has been crying out for a first-party RPG of some kind, and *Ashen* might just fit the bill. As an open world, co-op and multiplayer role player, there's a lot going on here. It's been compared to *Kings Quest* and *DayZ* in its approach to gameplay, with a muted and rather haunting art style where the heroes have featureless faces. Levelling up is done through collecting items and talismans rather than through stats.



10 THINGS WE LEARNT ABOUT GOD OF WAR

THE RETURN OF KRATOS IS LOOKING BETTER AND BETTER

FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY** | DEVELOPER: **SIE SANTA MONICA STUDIO** | RELEASE: **Q1 2018**

THE AXE IS VERSATILE

1 We already knew from previous showcases that Kratos' new weapon of choice was far more useful than it might first appear, but its abilities go beyond even just throwing it and having it fly back. Launch it into walls and call it back from behind enemies to catch them out.

KRATOS HAS A RETRACTABLE SHIELD

2 The Greek master of gore has never been much of a defensive fighter, so we weren't terribly surprised to see that a shield in his hands is more of a weapon than anything else. Kratos uses it to beat his enemies into a pulp, chaining it with other blows.

THERE ARE DEAD GIANTS ABOUT

3 Keep an eye out in the background of some shots and you'll see dead frost giants – known as Jötunn in Norse mythology – dead and broken on the ground. Gigantic enemies and living landscapes have been a staple of this series, so meeting a live one seems likely.

ATREUS HELPS OUT IN BATTLE...

4 Kratos has a son, and while his first reveal painted a picture of a relatively timid young boy, at his heart he's the son of a god of war, so he can throw down as his confidence improves. Look for him to fire shocking arrows and leap on the backs of enemies.

...AND HE'S A GOOD TRANSLATOR TOO

5 Atreus is essential to Kratos' navigating this strange land, as he's the only one of the pair who knows how to read and translate Norse languages. You'll need to lean on his skills if you want to make any sense of this strange new realm.



THE ENVIRONMENT IS DESTRUCTIBLE

6 We had some hints at this before, but more gameplay has only confirmed our suspicions that large sections of the masonry and other structures can be completely demolished through combat. Those trolls can pack a punch, even through stone columns.

KRATOS HAS A REPUTATION HERE

7 The people here seem to know well who Kratos really is, or at least the Norse gods do. Just how much you'll need to confront the local deities is something we'll have to wait to find out, but they seem to be taking a keen interest in your journey.

THE WORLD SERPENT MAY BE YOUR BUDDY

8 We suspected from the newly designed logo for *God Of War* that the World Serpent, Jörmungandr, would play a role in this game. On first encountering him, though, it seems he is not a boss fight but a potential ally. What could this son of Loki want with Kratos?

THE OLD BLADES WERE TOO EMOTIONAL

9 The development team has addressed the fact that Kratos has left his chained blades behind him, with only his scars remaining. Apparently they just carry too many bad memories for Kratos, and this will be addressed in the game.

IT'S ALL DONE IN 'ONE SHOT'

10 Director Cory Barlog wanted to have *God Of War* be one continuous shot from beginning to end. He even used the hospital shootout in *Hard Boiled* as an example to his development team. It's an ambitious idea, and we're keen to see how it works.





Switch between vehicles and crew members during a mission to accomplish your goals

NEED FOR SPEED: PAYBACK SWITCHES IT UP

GET SOME HIGH-SPEED REVENGE WITH A DASH OF BURNOUT

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | RELEASE: **10 NOV** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **EA** | DEVELOPER: **GHOST GAMES**

Following a year's lay off in the developmental garage, the racing series of a thousand faces returns with its most *Fast & Furious* entry yet. OK, driving as a crew, pulling off heists and burning rubber across another generic North American landscape might be old-hat by now, but Ghost Games is looking to double down on what it does best by making it as over-the-top and cinematic as it can be.

You'll work as a crew of three new drivers, each one with the specific skills needed for stealing cars and other vehicular misdemeanours. You can switch between each one during a mission, with a greater focus on the kind of action set pieces that would make Dom Toretto gulp with apprehension. There's still plenty of high-speed action, with *Payback* adding in a real (and very welcome) *Burnout* feel to its motorised destruction. There's even going to be a single-player offline mode, too.



PROJECT CARS 2

RACING SIMULATOR? PFFT, THIS IS A TRACK SIMULATOR

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC, PS4** | 4K: **YES** | RELEASE: **22 SEP**
PUBLISHER: **BANDAI NAMCO** | DEVELOPER: **SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS**

With *GT Sport* yet to pick up speed, *Project Cars 2* is taking on *Forza Motorsport 7* for the racing simulator crown. Both meticulously recreate some of the world's most impressive cars, but the petrol-headed faithful are only interested in one thing in 2017: the tracks.

Project Cars 2 is firing on every cylinder with its new and improved Live Track 3.0 feature, which creates a dynamic maelstrom of weather, track temperature, ambient temperature, altitude and more. Just like *Forza 7*, rain storms will create pools of water that increase in size and depth as a race progresses - add that to *Project Cars*' uniquely brutal driving model and you've got one hugely faithful racing sim.



THE CREW 2

TAKE TO THE ROAD, RIVERS AND SKY AS UBISOFT'S RACER RETURNS

FORMAT: **PS4, PC, XBOX ONE** | RELEASE: TBC **2018**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **IVORY TOWER PRODUCTIONS** | 4K: **YES**

Ubisoft's open-USA arcade racer is back, and now it's more than just racing cars across American soil. New races, events and challenges include boats, planes and more, as developer Ivory Tower attempts to make good on the original game's middling gameplay.

You can switch between vehicles instantly, and some races include multiple distinctions as you transition from supercar to speed boat to cloud-piercing stunt plane. The open world is once again a truncated USA (one that's 2,000 square miles). With street racing, pro racing, off-road and freestyle events, and a free-flowing XP reward system, this co-op-friendly racer has *Forza Horizon 3* in its sights.



GT SPORT

SONY'S RACING GIANT IS LOOKING GREAT, BUT IS THAT ENOUGH IN 2017?

FORMAT: **PS4** | RELEASE: **TBC 2017** | PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **POLYPHONY DIGITAL** | 4K: **YES**

With *Forza* and *Project Cars* right in its rearview mirror, Polyphony Digital has a lot to prove with its new (and heavily delayed) *GT Sport* entry. There's no exact date in place, but Polyphony says it hopes to have what it considers to be *Gran Turismo 7* before the year is out. The PS4 racer will include 27 tracks from 15 real-world locations including Brands Hatch, the Nürburgring and the recently unveiled Bathurst.

We're told that *GT Sport* will feature the meticulous car recreation, track design, lighting and physics the veteran series is known for, but with *Forza 7* and *Project Cars 2* putting the focus on dynamic weather and track simulation, Sony's original driving sim needs to get its gears shifted!

A WAY OUT IS GOING TO REVOLUTIONISE CO-OP

THIS TALE OF TWO CROOKS IS A GAME TO WATCH



FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PS4, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **EA** | DEVELOPER: **HAZELIGHT STUDIOS** | RELEASE: **Q1 2018**

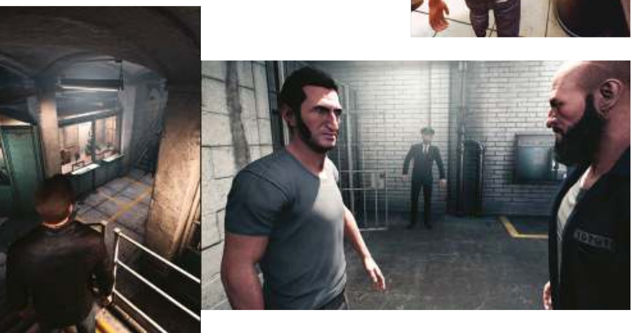
Hazelight, a small 35-staff studio created by the core team responsible for Starbreeze Studios' *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons*, might be punching above its weight here, working on what seems to be the very definition of a passion project. But that doesn't seem to bother this group of hyper-passionate developers – the company wants to change gaming and the way we interact with our friends. "After I finished [making] *Brothers*, I wanted to make another game that pushed the boundaries on how to tell stories without compromising on gameplay," says game director, writer and studio head Josef Fares. *A Way Out* is that game; a high fidelity, high-concept release that looks like a Quantic Dream project viewed through the lens of *Prison Break*.

Where *A Way Out* demonstrates some serious ambition is in its demand that the entire game be played in co-op. "The game is designed for split-screen co-op only… and I mean *only*!" says Fares, who notes that while it will be playable online, the team has designed for the game to be played in one particular way. "For you to get the full experience, we want you and your friend to play it on your couch."

Controlling either Vincent or Leo, *A Way Out* follows the duo as they attempt to break out of prison and head out on a journey across the country, with emotional story twists and unique gameplay opportunities around every corner. The split-screen balance will shift depending on who has prominence in a particular story or gameplay moment, one player can have complete autonomy over a scene while the other is in a cut-scene and, interestingly, Fares is promising that no two moments in the game will ever reuse the same gameplay mechanics. It's a wildly ambitious idea, and one we really hope the studio is able to pull off.

"THE GAME IS FOR SPLIT-SCREEN CO-OP ONLY… AND I MEAN ONLY!"
JOSEF FARES, STUDIO HEAD

To make *A Way Out* happen, the team is going all out. Fares cancelled a feature film he was directing to devote more time to the project; going as far as to cast himself as one of the two leads, Vincent, motion-capturing the character himself on his weekends off. The other starring character, Leo, is actually played by Josef Fares' older brother, actor Fares Fares. Cinematic, smartly constructed and groundbreaking for its presentation and its twist of co-op convention, *A Way Out* is already one of 2018's most anticipated titles. Whether Hazelight has the resources and personnel to actually pull it all off is another question entirely.





Studio head Josef Fares has cast himself in one of A Way Out's two lead roles.



MARIO MAKEOVER

Thanks to the addition of Crazy Cap stores, Mario can now be outfitted in a huge number of different getups. Interestingly, these aren't just a fun way to play dress up – each outfit will also influence the gameplay, too, unlocking secret areas across different worlds.

HATS OFF

Thanks to Mario's latest friend, Cappy, players can take control of everything from enemies, to objects and creepily even the inhabitants of New Donk City. Who knew that the latest Mario game would secretly be a follow-up to Gamecube possess-em-up Geist?

SPACE HOPPER

In a nod to *Mario Galaxy*, it looks like everyone's favourite tiny Italian will be piloting a flying ship once again. With the number of worlds still yet to be announced, based on what we've seen so far, you can expect Mario's new vehicle to take him to all manner of wonderfully bizarre locations.

MOON MAGIC

Instead of his usual quest for stars, this time the mustachioed mascot will be tracking down Power Moons instead. With the devious little moons hidden in hard to get places, each star will reward you with a different personalised message.



SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY IS NINTENDO AT ITS DARING BEST

EXPECT BODY SWAPPING, WORLD HOPPING AND EVEN CLOTHES SHOPPING.

FORMAT: **SWITCH** | 4K: **NO** | PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | RELEASE: **27 OCT**

When Nintendo first unveiled Mario's upcoming Switch adventure, it was hard to know what to make of it. As its debut trailer flickered onto the screen during the January reveal event, the opening shot panned across a bustling digital depiction of Manhattan. Before confused fans had the time to process the concrete jungle before them, Nintendo's mustachioed plumber suddenly burst out of a manhole, enthusiastically jumping around the jarringly-realistic recreation of New York City. As Mario gleefully collected coins and athletically scaled nearby traffic lights, the usual Mushroom Kingdom stalwarts of Toads and Goombas were nowhere to be seen, replaced instead by men in pinstripe suits and honking yellow taxis.

For a company that's often criticized for being creatively conservative, it was surprising to see Nintendo place its flagship platformer in a setting that looked so alien. Yet, while that initial trailer made *Super Mario Odyssey* seem more like a bizarre fan mod than the next great Nintendo game, after spending a joyous hour with the game, it looks like Mario's latest adventure is shaping up to be his most ambitious yet.

"MARIO'S LATEST ADVENTURE IS SHAPING UP TO BE HIS MOST AMBITIOUS YET"

The first thing that becomes clear while running around *Odyssey*'s intricately crafted playgrounds is just how expansive its environments are. Unlike the aggressive linearity that defined the Wii U's *Super Mario 3D World*, in the plumber's first Switch outing, players are no longer forced down a set path. Here, each 'world' takes the form of an open-ended 3D sandbox, inviting players to discover each map's secrets in any order they please.

Being on Switch, there are of course several different ways that you can choose to play the game. Strapping on a Joycon in each hand, this control scheme feels immediately reminiscent of the mustachioed mascot's interstellar Wii entry – *Super Mario Galaxy*. Aside from the fundamentals of using the analogue stick to move Mario and tapping A to send him bounding into the air, it was surprising to see that motion controls have been brought back with such a vengeance. After holding either trigger to crouch, flicking your wrist in a subtle drumming motion sends Mario hurtling headfirst down the bustling streets. It all feels very Wii-esque, for better and for worse.

Yet, while rolling is obviously useful, there's a more crucial gameplay mechanic that's mapped to motion controls. Flicking either Joycon upward or downward causes Mario to fling his hat, sending it spinning in whichever direction he's facing. While that doesn't sound hugely revolutionary, there's more than meets the eye to this seemingly simplistic attack. Once you've thrown Cappy (Mario's imaginatively named googly-eyed hat), players can temporarily take control of any enemies or objects that said magical cap lands on. While the motion controls felt fine, for traditional control purists there's also the option to use the Pro Controller.

Sprinting around the streets of the Manhattan-esque New Donk City, players are free to use Mario's creepy new possession power to its full advantage. As we jump and swing our way up an apartment block like an out of shape Spider-Man, a badly aimed hat throw sees us accidentally possessing a fire hydrant. While being a glorified water pump isn't exactly an exhilarating gaming experience, the fact that we *can* take control of one if we so choose shows just how brilliantly implemented this strange new mechanic really is. Whether it's using Cappy to take a control of a man playing with a remote controlled car, or throwing the hat onto a hidden rocket that transports players to a secret area, this bizarre tool added a brilliant new dimension to the tried-and-tested *Mario* platforming.

Yet, it's not just Cappy that's shaking up the series. One of the biggest surprises lying in wait for players can be found in Crazy Cap. »

RETRO RUNNINGS

In the Mexican-themed Sand Kingdom, Mario finds himself transported to the past in this brilliant little platforming Easter egg. With each sandbox bursting with areas to explore, you can expect some equally wonderful hidden moments littered throughout the game.

A LINK TO THE PAST

GAMING'S MOST FAMOUS DAMSEL IN DISTRESS RETURNS



It's been little over a decade since Pauline last appeared alongside Mario, one of gaming's original and most famous damsels in distress. She disappeared without a trace, replaced by Princess Peach, around the same time that Nintendo replaced Donkey Kong with Bowser. But for *Super Mario Odyssey*, Pauline will be making a startling return and not as someone waiting to be rescued from a cage or perilously placed platform. She's now the mayor of New Donk City – a leading star in what will likely be one of Mario's most daring adventures. She's tasked with keeping her city safe, handing missions off to Mario, and for delighting the residents with live sessions of smooth jazz (which also informs much of the tone and feel of the starring city). It's a new look and new role for Pauline, and it's fantastic to see, although Nintendo won't be drawn on whether her old nemesis – big DK himself – will be making a return as well. With the Empire State Building in sight, you have to wonder whether Nintendo will let this King Kong opportunity pass it by.

In a Mario first, players can enter this strange store and exchange *Odyssey*'s new purple coins for a wide range of different outfits. Surprisingly, though, this shiny shop doesn't just offer players a bit of cosmetic fun – its wonderfully ridiculous outfits actually have an impact on the game world. Running down a sketchy-looking alleyway, Mario's path was blocked by a New York wise guy. With building work going on behind him, the steadfast suit would only let players in if they looked the part. This is where a bit of dress-up comes in handy. In order to access this sealed-off area, players will have to earn enough coins to net them a *Mario-Maker*-esque construction outfit so that they can blend in.

> "SO FAR, THERE LOOKS TO BE A STAGGERING AMOUNT OF CONTENT CRAMMED INTO EACH SANDBOX"

While our time with each sandbox was obviously limited, that still didn't stop *Odyssey*'s wonderful worlds from impressing. Like in pretty much every other *Mario* game, players are once again tasked with tracking down a slew of difficult to obtain collectables – but this time, Nintendo has swapped stars, for Power Moons. The rest of **games™**'s trip to New Donk City consisted of climbing every building in sight, leaping onto nearby cranes and diving into manhole covers in order to track down those precious Power Moons. Exploring the tightly packed metropolis, it was refreshing to play a Mario level that not only offered so much verticality, but also one which let players explore it in the order that they see fit. With between 30-50 moons hidden across each world, it quickly becomes clear that this demo barely scratches the surface of what New Donk City had to offer.

The second part of the E3 demo let us explore a completely different world – The Sand Kingdom. This Mexican-inspired desert level not only offered a more familiar aesthetic, but also a more familiar approach to platforming. Running through a village populated by sombrero-wearing skeletons, a few of its inhabitants pleaded with Mario to help free their friends, who had mysteriously been encased in prisms of ice.

Here, you are tasked with making it through a more linear progression, requiring careful timing as you hop across a series of moving platforms towards a nearby tower. Initially, this level seemed more like the *Mario* of old, but once again, it was the little touches that made this seemingly traditional section feel fresh. After dispatching a few unlucky Goombas, players soon find themselves in the middle of an aerial assault. Using a carefully considered flick of the wrist, they can launch Cappy on top of an attacking Bullet Bill, putting them in control of the angry-looking rocket.

While you could simply jump over the Bullet Bill and advance as normal, not only would you miss out on a refreshing change in pace but, more importantly, you'd be down a Power Moon. With the flying Bill under their control, players can use the analogue stick to change the

Just as *Breath Of The Wild* unshackled Link, *Odyssey* sees Mario exploring more expansive worlds.

Cappy's unique possession-like powers change the way you look at and interact with Mario's surroundings.

With 30-50 Power Moons hidden across each world, there are many secrets for players to find.



angry rocket's direction, guiding him towards an island of floating blocks that was previously inaccessible. As Mario arrives at the platform a tap of the A button causes him to jump out of the bullet in his regular form, allowing the nimble plumber to scale the floating obstacles and grab a well-earned Power Moon. It's a brilliant touch that once again shows just how varied Cappy can make gameplay.

Despite all this invention, it was nice to see that Nintendo is also keen to tip its hat to the past. In a nice nod to where Mario began, jumping through a certain pipe during this Mexican level saw our hero trapped in a wall, transforming him into a 2D version of himself. In a nostalgia-filled section, the soundtrack switches to the classic 8-bit bleeps and bloops that defined countless childhoods, as an advancing sea of Bullet Bills sees Mario hopping and stomping his way across the enemy-ridden wall. The whole thing was unexpected and felt utterly seamless, with leaping over the top layer of blocks at the end of the section causing the mustachioed mascot to effortlessly segue back into full 3D.

While it would be a bit of a stretch to call *Odyssey* an open-world game, from what's been shown so far, there looks to be a staggering amount of content crammed into each sandbox, a wild expansion of the *Super Mario 64* and *Super Mario Sunshine* experiences. With hidden bonus areas, a plethora of mini games, and even mission objectives to complete, the plumber's true Switch debut boasts a surprising amount of depth for a *Mario* platformer. After raising the bar for open-world games with March's *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath of The Wild*, for the second time in 2017, *Super Mario Odyssey* looks to show a Nintendo at its daring best.



REVISITING PAST PLEASURES



METROID: SAMUS RETURNS

A revitalized and redesigned version of the 1991 game *Metroid II: Return Of Samus*, this 3DS release set for September sees developer MercurySteam looking to exorcise many of the demons that plagued the Game Boy original. As the first traditional Metroid game released in some time, this will be a huge opportunity for Nintendo to recognize the franchise still has fans across the globe.



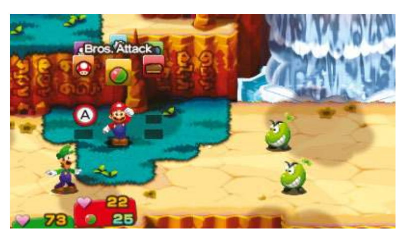
POKKEN TOURNAMENT DX

The ever-popular Pokémon fighting game is coming to Switch, bringing all new Pokémon fighters – now with over 20 to choose from – and a whole new array of ways to battle other players, *Pokken Tournament DX* is going to be the ultimate version of this Wii U classic.



SUPER LUCKY'S TALE

Lucky's Tale may have first found attention as a launch title for VR platform Oculus Rift, but it's now getting a sequel for standard screens to get wider exposure. Coming to Xbox One and Windows 10, this puzzle platformer is offering the sort of *Super Mario 64*-inspired, family-friendly play we're only used to seeing on Nintendo systems.



MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

The game that kickstarted the *Mario & Luigi* series back in 2003 is making a huge comeback this year with the (re) launch of *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, along with a companion adventure called *Bowser's Minions*. Innovative controls, excellent RPG systems and some classic level design make this a must play 3DS game for 2017.



DID NINTENDO "WIN E3" IN 25 MINUTES?

WITHOUT EVEN TAKING A STAGE, NINTENDO MANAGED TO CAPTURE THE HEARTS OF ITS HARD-CORE FANBASE

In an E3 that has broadly been described as underwhelming by many, not least because it was largely packed with games we already knew about, Nintendo seemed to understand that the famous gaming convention is about spectacle and excitement, even if you're showing off your wares via a livestream, not a stage. In its 25-minute Spotlight showcase it managed to generate more intrigue, excitement and surprises than Microsoft managed in two hours, and *it* had a new console to reveal.

Of course the big headline grabber was that *Metroid Prime 4* was announced, but even that was only a few seconds of a logo revealing itself. Who would have thought something so simple would be so effective? Would the same have worked for Microsoft or Sony with their glitzy, heavily-managed stage shows? Probably not.

But it wasn't just about that. Nintendo has had a fantastic 12 months beginning at E3 2016. From the extended gameplay demos of *Breath Of The Wild* through to the summer that saw *Pokémon Go* dominate the gaming landscape, from the release of the NES Mini and debut of Mario on mobile device with *Super Mario Run*, Nintendo is on a hot streak and this year's showing felt like a victory lap. The Nintendo Switch is a massive success, tapping into a gap in the market that seemed insanely small (a console to handheld hybrid didn't necessarily seem essential) but managing to make it insanely appealing to gamers of any age.

As it stood, Nintendo didn't need to spend much time talking about its packed summer of games like *Splatoon 2*, *Arms*, *Minecraft*, *Skyrim* and more as it could look further ahead to the winter release schedule with Mario leading the charge and the potentially epic *Xenoblade Chronicles 2* eating up whatever additional time we have left to fill. And in showing how much more with the times Nintendo has become, it revealed a fine selection of *Zelda: BOTW* DLC packages to keep interest in that title alive for the rest of the year. This doesn't feel like the console maker we remember from a couple of years ago. This feels like a publisher working on the cutting edge of design with a healthy reverence for its own past.

> "THIS DOESN'T FEEL LIKE THE CONSOLE MAKER WE REMEMBER FROM A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO."

So, did Nintendo "Win E3"? As loath as we are to proclaim a winner to a games convention that's about selling us games, Nintendo certainly seemed to put together the most fan-pleasing and multi-faceted show of the three console manufacturers even within the limited time that it had. While Xbox concentrated on 4K games for the end of this year and Sony showcased largely its grown-up offerings for PS4, Nintendo had a little something for everyone and continued after the Spotlight with *Metroid II* and *Mario & Luigi* remakes for the 3DS. And on the show floor it had its biggest game ready to play in the form of *Super Mario Odyssey*. We think we avoided answering the question there, right?

Let us just say, Nintendo is on a hot streak and one that shows no signs of slowing down in the coming months. If it can continue to support the Switch with exciting third-party releases and keep those essential first-party mascots feeding through each year, this console is in fantastic shape, even against the massive install bases of the Xbox One and PS4. And then it went and announced the SNES Mini!



THE FAN REACTION TIMELINE

NINTENDO'S NEW YORK STORE SCREENED THE E3 2017 SPOTLIGHT STREAM FOR FANS AND WE TRACKED THEIR EXCITEMENT LEVELS

1:09	Countdown begins	7
1:45	*Rocket League* in Switch revealed	7
3:28	Reggie Fils-Aime appears, crowd starts going "shush"	5
4:42	*Monolith Soft* logo appears	7
7:46	New *Kirby* for Switch revealed	8
8:49	*Kirby* 2018 date announced	6
10:02	Tsunekazu Ishihara of The Pokémon Company appears	6
10:51	Mainline *Pokémon* RPG for Switch announced	9
11:45	Space-like backdrop emerges	4
11:56	'S' symbol begins to reveal	6
11:59	'4' appears on top of symbol	8
12:09	*Metroid Prime 4* logo	10
12:39	New *Yoshi* revealed	5
13:53	*Fire Emblem Warriors* trailer begins	6
17:00	New *Zelda: BOTW* armour revealed	6
21:17	*Mario + Rabbids* demoed	6
23:37	T-Rex walks into frame	6
23:53	Mario leaps from T-Rex	7
24:27	2D sections of *Super Mario Odyssey* revealed	8
24:47	Possession gameplay revealed	8
25:31	Mario possesses a pedestrian in New Donk City	9
25:38	Mario possesses the T-Rex	9
25:48	*Super Mario Odyssey* release date confirmed	10

Watch KirbyGCN17's video at **youtu.be/x-TUvASL-qY**



SUCH A TEASE

NINTENDO LOOKS TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM WITH SOME FUTURE REVEALS





METROID PRIME 4

1 Ongoing calls for F-Zero aside, a return to the Metroid Prime series was probably the most-demanded title from the hardcore Nintendo brigade and while it only had a logo to show, it was enough for now. The one-two punch of a 3DS remake of *Metroid II* helped to cement the renewed support for Samus Aran and while some may be upset Retro doesn't appear to be handling *MP4*, it still has series producer Kensuke Tanabe at the helm.



POKEMON SWITCH

2 While The Pokémon Company's Tsunekazu Ishihara was on hand to reveal that a mainline Pokémon RPG was in development for the Nintendo Switch, in many ways we got even less from this game announcement than we did from *Metroid Prime 4*. That said, a fully featured Pokémon experience wasn't necessarily something we were expecting to hear about so soon in the Switch's lifecycle. After all, the series has been doing well enough on mobile and 3DS.



KIRBY

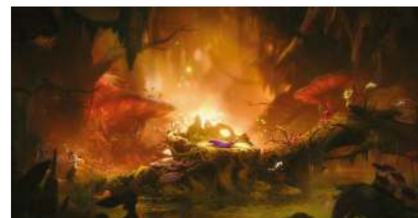
3 Is Nintendo on a bit of a possession kick? We only ask because while Mario is throwing his cap on enemies to take control of them, *Kirby* is chucking hearts at them to have them join his entourage of player-controlled characters. It looks like it could be a very fun new mechanic as your Kirby surrogates join together to tackle enemies and puzzles. It also seems as if a four-player co-op experience will be a part of the game, which is good news, too.



YOSHI

4 It doesn't feel like all that long ago that we were enjoying *Yoshi's Woolly World*, with an unspecified 2018 release date it will actually have been three years since the Wii U game was released. While our favourite Mario steed is looking more felt now than wool, the game world appears to be offering the most clear-cut evolution of gameplay as the whole stage can be flipped to see what exists on the other side. This *Yoshi* looks to be set in a kind of toybox environment.





ORI AND THE WILL OF THE WISPS

MOON MAKES ANOTHER CASE FOR THIS BEING XBOX'S BEST-LOOKING SERIES

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT STUDIOS** | DEVELOPER: **MOON STUDIOS** RELEASE: **TBC**

While many might quibble with Microsoft's first-party line-up in some respects, there can be no denying that one of the most fan-pleasing and gorgeous titles to be revealed in recent weeks is this return of Ori. Moon Studios blew us away with how it combined stunning visuals and deep, challenging gameplay last time out, and we expect nothing less from this sequel.

The studio has talked about the teaser taking a few hundred iterations before it settled on the final reveal and promises it is taking just as much care with every stage and challenge in the game. We'll be keeping our fingers crossed for a release close to the launch of Xbox One X as 4K support for this title will be amazing.



HIDDEN AGENDA

A DECEPTIVELY GOOD CRIME THRILLER

FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY** DEVELOPER: **SUPERMASSIVE GAMES** | RELEASE: **TBC 2017**

If the pressure of making story decisions in Telltale games or in Supermassive's horror hit *Until Dawn* has proved to be too much for you to bear alone, then this might be the experience for you. *Hidden Agenda* is a party game of sorts and the crown jewel of Sony's Playlink scheme that allows you to control and interact with games using a smartphone.

As you play through this crime thriller all of the players get to vote on what action to take next and, just like *Until Dawn*, a wrong move can see any of the characters in the story die at any time. To spice things up, a hidden agenda mechanic within the game means each player might have a secret objective to convince you of as you play. This promises to be very special indeed.



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II IS THE BIGGEST MULTIPLAYER SPECTACLE OF THE YEAR

SPANNING EVERY STAR WARS ERA, GET READY FOR ONE HELL OF A BATTLE!

FORMAT: **PS4, PC, XBOX ONE** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **EA** | DEVELOPER: MOTIVE STUDIOS, **DICE** | RELEASE: **17 NOV 2017**

This is all about giving fans what they wanted. A daunting single-player experience that's looking to bridge the 30-year gap between *Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* and *The Force Awakens*, it's going to see the return of space battles, the season pass has been axed, and yes, multiplayer is back and it's bigger than ever.

DICE and Motive are delivering one of the most impressive shooters we've ever seen in *Battlefront II*. A game that is undoubtedly heavy on spectacle, it delivers what could be the most authentic Star Wars experience ever committed to console.

However, the scope is larger for this sequel, with DICE expanding the action out of the original trilogy and dipping into the eras that straddle it. That means that fan favourite maps, droids and heroes will be making an appearance. You'll be able to see Darth Maul going head-to-head with Rey in the throne room of Naboo's Theed. You'll also be able to take super battle droids up against the clone troopers, and we will finally be able to break orbit and pit X-wings against Tie Fighters in an intergalactic dogfight.

With a number of quality of life changes being made under the hood, *Battlefront II* is destined to play better than the original, look better than anything else coming this year – Frostbite continues to sizzle – and provide what should be an unforgettable Star Wars experience.







Battlefront II will also feature an all-new solo campaign, answering those who claimed the 2015 version lacked a meaningful narrative.



FAR CRY 5 TAKES THE FIGHT TO CULTIST CRUELTY

UBISOFT MONTREAL BRINGS ITS OPEN-WORLD SHOOTER HOME ON THE RANGE

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL** | RELEASE: **27 FEB 2018**

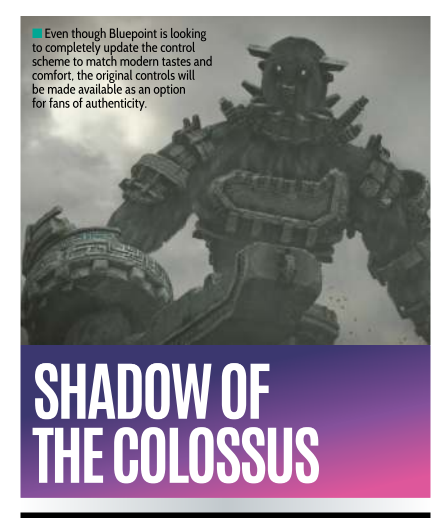
E3 2017 finally unveiled *Far Cry 5*'s gameplay and it looks… just like you would expect. It's a double-edged sword for Ubisoft's other big franchise – on the one hand the series does what it does very well, but after so many games, a shift to a drastically different setting and a politically-reactive story might not be enough to justify its place in the gaming world of today.

Thankfully, what is new in *FC5* does leave us with a glimmer of hope. You're no longer fighting the good fight alone (which now sees you taking on a bunch of religious fundamentalists), with the option to choose one of three new NPC companions: the sniper prowess of Grace, the explosive air support of Nick Rye, and the scouting smarts of Boomer the dog. Obviously, we're all going to pick the dog, but we appreciate the option to tailor an NPC to suit a given playstyle. Co-op shenanigans also return.

Ubisoft Montreal has gone to great pains to capture the idyllic atmosphere of Montana, from swaying plains of grass to snow-tipped mountains, and the greater emphasis on destructible scenery and a more robust AI means firefights will offer a far greater unpredictability than previous entries.



You'll be able to have more than one companion at some points, so expect plenty of "Good boy!" action.



Even though Bluepoint is looking to completely update the control scheme to match modern tastes and comfort, the original controls will be made available as an option for fans of authenticity.

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

SONY REMAKES A COLOSSAL CLASSIC

FORMAT: **PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **BLUEPOINT GAMES** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018**

Bluepoint continues to be the trustee of Sony's most beloved titles as it brings *Shadow Of The Colossus* to another generation of consoles. Bluepoint managed the last remaster of this game along with *Ico* on the PS3, but this is something more than that, even if it's only the one Fumito Ueda game this time around. This isn't just a remaster, but a complete remake.

Why is that important? Well, it means that this isn't just about slapping some new textures on old code or holding to the past in terms of mechanics and feeling as if they're gospel. We've already got two examples of that version of *SOTC*, so Bluepoint is replicating everything that Ueda did but with all the bells and whistles of modern releases.

That means improved textures and lighting, of course, taking a game that was already gorgeous to look at – albeit pulling every trick it could for its time – and making it truly stunning. And on top of that, it will also be looking to modernise some of the game's key features, with particular emphasis on the control scheme, which was a little odd even for its time and might benefit from some contemporary influence.





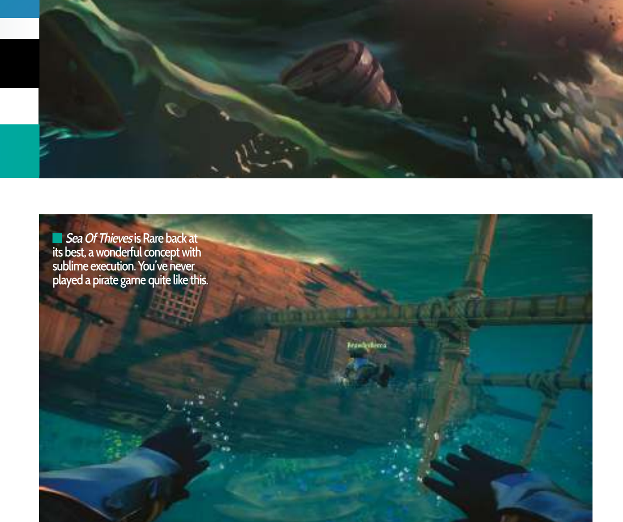
SEA OF THIEVES IS MICROSOFT'S KILLER IP

RARE IS BACK TO ITS BEST

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE** | 4K: **YES** | RELEASE: **Q1 2018**
PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT** | DEVELOPER: **RARE**

It almost feels redundant to point this out now, but here we go all the same: *Sea Of Thieves* is only as good as the people that you have by your side. It feels as if Microsoft has done its best to make that clear over the years, but the gravity of this message only becomes clear once you get your hands on a controller.

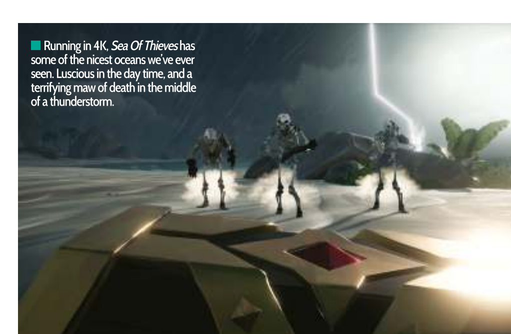
You see, *Sea Of Thieves* has been designed to satisfy a particular type of fantasy. It is, in the loosest sense, a simulation more so than anything else. But not, critically, in the way that you would traditionally think about a 'simulation' or, we suppose, in the survivalistic sense that has come to be associated with that specific genre description. *Sea Of Thieves* is inherently focused on helping you find the fun in working together with others, as opposed to making you adhere to hard-core rules and systems in an effort to summon some masochistic concept of fun. Because, when everything comes together it truly is the ultimate pirate experience, a marauding


Sea Of Thieves is Rare back at its best, a wonderful concept with sublime execution. You've never played a pirate game quite like this.





Sea Of Thieves is scheduled to launch at the beginning of 2018 for Xbox One and Windows 10.


Running in 4K, *Sea Of Thieves* has some of the nicest oceans we've ever seen. Luscious in the day time, and a terrifying maw of death in the middle of a thunderstorm.

A PIRATE'S LIFE FOR ME

THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE DANGERS YOU'LL ENCOUNTER





SKELETONS

Once you hit dry land, you should expect to encounter the remnants of other lost adventurers. Skeletal figures will appear, leaving you with nothing but a sword and a slow-loading musket to defend yourself. Combat is challenging, and a little clunky, but the balance between fun and frustrating is almost there.



GETTING LOST

Getting lost is a reality in *Sea Of Thieves*, especially as navigation relies entirely on maps and compasses. Every player has a pocket compass, though if multiple players want to look at a map it will need to be held out in front of you before being slipped away to let the adventure continue.



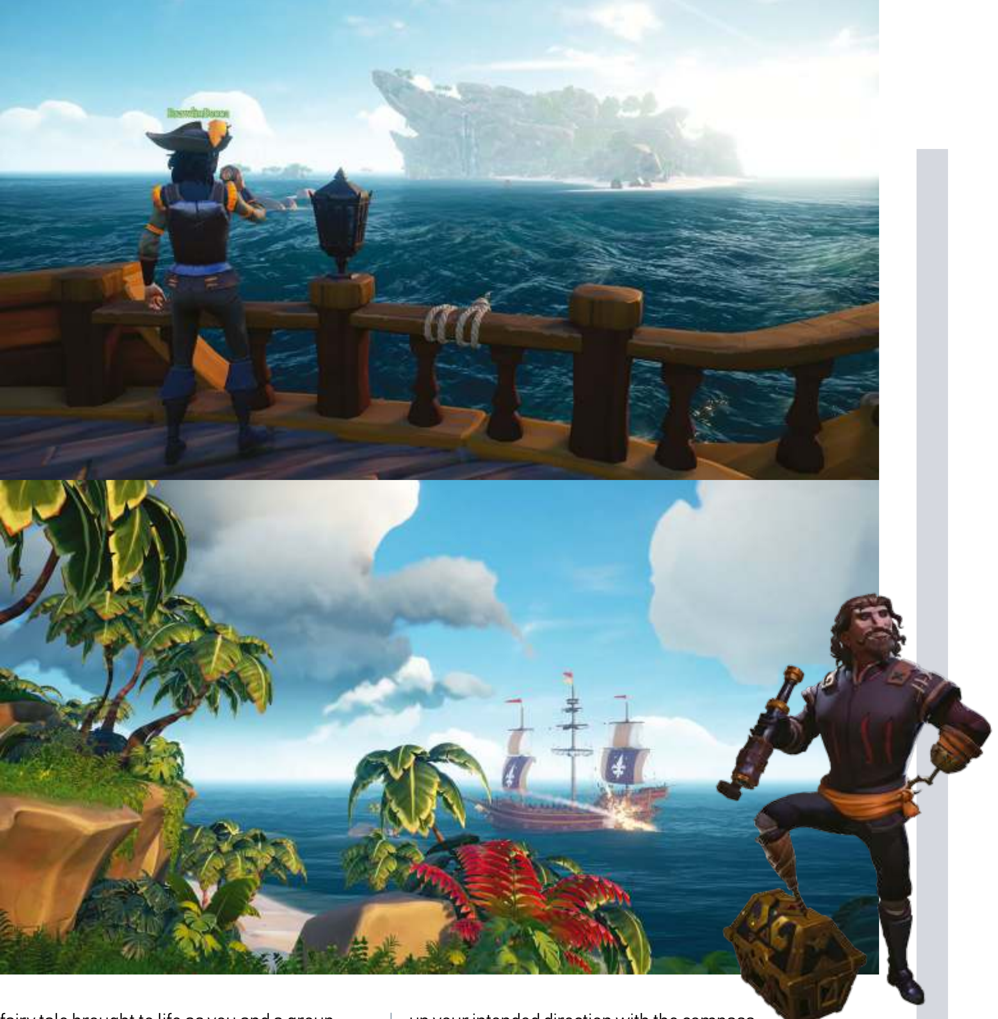
OTHER SHIPS

Naval combat is one of the best things to engage with in *Sea Of Thieves*. There is no telling what other players will do in a high-pressure situation, which is what makes it so thrilling! Players need to keep track of positioning, damage and ammunition, all while still manning their stations.



BEING BOARDED

Boarding another ship is no easy task. You can sneak aboard via the ocean, or get close enough to jump onto the other ship from the crow's nest. But our favourite is leaping into a cannon and getting another player to blast us across the open water and right onto the enemy's deck.



fairy tale brought to life as you and a group of friends work to navigate the open seas, plunder lush islands for treasures, and look to see off rival pirate groups that you spot on the distant horizon.

Completing the simplest and smallest of acts can feel like a triumph. Sailing requires a nominal amount of communication and co-ordination to succeed – though even that, as we all know by now, will be a herculean task online, when surrounded by strangers – as each player takes on a specific role aboard your vessel. These roles, while never explicitly outlined, are obvious enough because of *Sea Of Thieves*' intuitive design. This is, of course, where Rare excels, in nuanced design decisions that *just work* – sometimes in spite of the environment that you find them in.

You need one player on the wheel to steer the ship and another in the crow's nest to alert your crew to environmental and physical threats; one on the deck drunkenly playing a sea shanty, and another watching over the map and needle. There is no HUD to speak of or obvious directional hints and waypoints to follow blindly in search of fortune. In a stroke of genius, every item – be it planks of wood to plug leaky holes, ammunition for the cannons, or your compass for navigational aid – in the game is a physical object. If you want to know where you are going you need to look at a physical map, lain out on a table with points of interest strewn across it, take in the islands and rock formations around you, and try to match up your intended direction with the compass pointer – your ship at the whim of the wind the entire time.

It's getting through these simple, unscripted moments that ensure *Sea Of Thieves* is always a riot to play through. It's a near continual triumph of teamwork and camaraderie, and this translates perfectly from the action on your ship to that on dry land. Treasure – of various rarities and value – are out there to be found, so long as you have the relevant treasure map. And, yes, of course 'X' marks the spot, but finding that 'X' is a whole other matter entirely.

Sea Of Thieves with a group that understands communication is quite unlike anything else on the slate for 2018, the worry is when you're left to roll with random pirates. Intuitive game design can only take you so far, especially when people begin jostling for specific roles or fail to organise during a ship-to-ship encounter. This is likely a problem that neither Rare nor Microsoft can solve, it's a reality (or flaw, depending on how you look at it) of the type of experience the legendary development studio has created here. But when it does come together, it's a hell of a lot of fun; a beautiful, challenging and rewarding adventure that rarely feels like it is treading old ground. *Sea Of Thieves* is unquestionably one of the most exciting titles coming to Xbox One, whether you can convince a group of friends that this is the case is ultimately down to you.

FROM THE FRINGES



DEEP ROCK GALACTIC

■ Join forces with up to three friends in this stylish co-op game, which sees you fighting, digging and exploring your way through procedurally generated cave systems. It looks like a lot of fun, but, as always, it'll likely only be as good as the dwarves that are working alongside you.



LASER LEAGUE

■ Four years in the making, *Laser League* from OlliOlli developer Roll7 is a frantic four-versus-four multiplayer game in which players battle it out for control of light nodes and territory in a tightly designed arena. Designed to be easily accessible but wrought with deceptively complex strategic possibilities, this is one sports title to keep your eyes on.



THE ESCAPISTS 2

■ Building on the huge success of its breakout hit, Team 17 is bringing *The Escapists* back for more prison break action. Offering multi-level prisons, new ways to escape, revamped combat systems and, impressively, drop-in/drop-out play across both split screen and online play in co-op and versus modes.



TROPICO 6

■ Welcome back El Presidente! Offering yet another opportunity to prove yourself as a maniacal dictator, *Tropico 6* is the first game in the series to offer up large archipelagos to rule over – managing multiple islands at a time for a fresh challenge – not to mention vastly expanded research and political systems.


Sebastian is going to have to work with Mobius, the organisation that dragged him through hell, in order to recover his daughter. But can anyone from that group really be trusted?



THE EVIL WITHIN 2 FINDS HUMANITY IN ITS HORROR

TANGO TAKES ANOTHER STAB AT OUR HORROR NERVES

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | RELEASE: **13 OCT** | 4K: **TBC** | PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA** | DEVELOPER: **TANGO GAMEWORKS**

Finally we have a hero from a survival horror game who behaves the way a normal person would, having lived through a nightmare made flesh: he hits the bottle. Sebastian Castellanos is back, and he's more than a little worse for wear three years after the events of the first game. No one has been willing to believe what he experienced, and in his and desperation he's fallen into alcohol addiction. Just when things seem to be at their worst, he finds out that the daughter he thought was dead may not be.

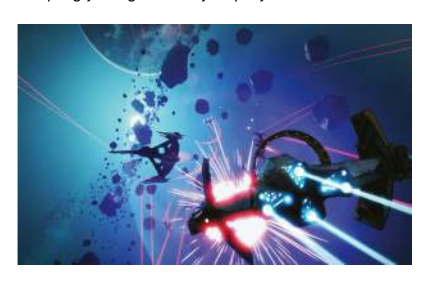
As if the heavy *Silent Hill* influence on *The Evil Within* hadn't given it some great psychological scares before, Sebastian's more compromised state is only likely to ramp things up even higher. As before, you'll need to sneak, fight and solve puzzles in order to gain the upper hand, but you may never be able to trust what you see in front of your eyes. In terms of how the game is looking to evolve, apparently the DLC from the first game has been the launchpad for changes to this sequel, which sounds like a very smart move to us.

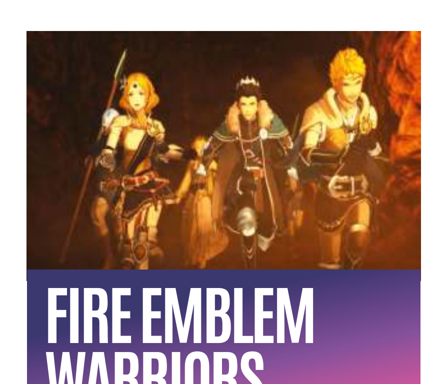
STARLINK

UBISOFT GIVES TOYS-TO-LIFE ANOTHER CHANCE

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, SWITCH** | 4K: **TBC**
RELEASE: **Q3 2018** | PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT TORONTO**

This isn't only a toys-to-life game, but one where you swap out pieces on your ship to change up your abilities and firepower. It's also a massive interplanetary sandbox where you can go where you like, seek out adventures and meet new and interesting alien life to team up with. *Starlink* has an evolving world that will change depending on your actions and alliances, shaping your game as you play.





FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS

THE STRATEGY AND CHAOS OF OMEGA FORCE WORKS WONDERS AGAIN

FORMAT: **SWITCH, 3DS** | RELEASE: **Q3 2017** | 4K: **YES**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO, TECMO KOEI**
DEVELOPER: **TEAM NINJA, OMEGA FORCE**

Continuing the partnership between Tecmo Koei and Nintendo, *Fire Emblem Warriors* does much the same for the strategy game as *Hyrule Warriors* did for the Zelda franchise – in fact, the mix of melee combat and tactical battleground play might even be a better fit. The series' weapons triangle adds greater depth as you switch between characters to gain advantage.

SONIC FORCES

THE HEDGEHOG'S 3D ADVENTURES CONTINUE TO EVOLVE

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, SWITCH, PC** | RELEASE: **Q4 2017**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA** | DEVELOPER: **SONIC TEAM** | 4K: **TBC**

Sonic Team is throwing a little bit of everything at this game in order to make a 3D Sonic adventure we can really enjoy. The *Sonic Generations* experiment of mixing modern third-person Sonic with classic side-view Sonic returns, while the new element, which appears to be a very strong new addition, is the ability to create your own Sonic-style characters to play as in the game.



RETRO-INSPIRED ROUNDUP

THE GAMES THAT HONOUR THE PAST WHILE BUILDING SOMETHING FRESH



BLOODSTAINED: RITUAL OF THE NIGHT

FORMAT: **PS3, XBOX ONE, SWITCH, VITA, PC**
DEVELOPER: **INTI CREATES** | RELEASE: **Q1 2018**

We always felt confident that in the hands of genre-master Koji Igarashi, *Bloodstained* would be reminiscent of the best of Castlevania, but as the game nears completion, it's establishing its own lore. Vampire hunting has been replaced by a cursed lead character, Miriam, who's gradually losing her humanity to a crystalline infection, but one that imbues her with incredible powers. How far will she go for a cure?



CUPHEAD

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **STUDIO MDHR**
RELEASE: **29 SEPT 2017**

This long-awaited indie has finally got a release date, and we only have a couple more months to wait before we finally all get to enjoy this insanely well-crafted, gorgeously rendered, beautifully scored and devilishly hard shooter. It's great to see that the time and space Studio MDHR has been given has really paid off in delivering a more feature-rich and complete experience than we first expected.



SONIC MANIA

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, SWITCH, PC** | RELEASE: **15 AUG 2017**
DEVELOPER: **HEADCANNON, PAGODAWEST GAMES**

A simultaneous return and homage to classic Sonic, *Sonic Mania* continues to show some amazingly inventive innovations and stylistic flourishes that honour the past while moving the experience forward. It's great to see how the levels complement the abilities of all three playable heroes: Sonic, Tails and Knuckles. The mixture of speed, skill and dexterity it demands promises something special indeed.



THE LAST NIGHT

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **ODD TALES**
RELEASE: **TBC 2018**

One of the most impressive-looking indie titles of Xbox's E3 press conference was this intriguing noir adventure. *The Last Night* leans more towards *Flashback*, *Another World* and *Oddworld* in its influences, as 2D pixelart characters move around a 3D, gorgeously lit world. You play as Charlie, someone living a tough life in a world where automation has created a dominant leisure lifestyle.



TUNIC

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | DEVELOPER: **ANDREW SHOULDICE** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018**

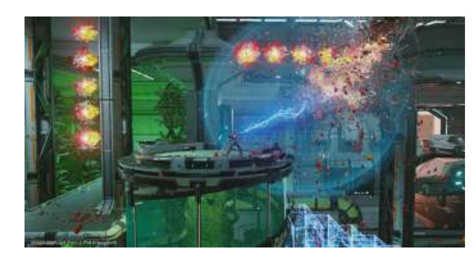
We've been tracking this Zelda-inspired RPG since it was known as *Secret Legend*, and we're pleased to see that a change in name hasn't meant a change in gameplay. The isometric, 3D, voxel-art style graphics remain in place, and we've now been able to see a little of the combat gameplay. Targeting lets you deftly move around your enemies, rolling around to avoid attacks before leaping in with your sword.



UNRULY HEROES

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, SWITCH, PC** | DEVELOPER: **MAGIC DESIGN STUDIOS** | RELEASE: **Q1 2018**

Inspired by the classic *Journey To The West* tale and side-scrolling co-op fighters like *Mark Of The Ninja*, this stunning new platformer has a style that reminds us a lot of *Rayman* and recent UbiArt Engine titles, but the gameplay adds another layer. Each playable character is utterly different from the rest, making multiple playthroughs and team-ups worth while. There even appears to be a versus mode.



MATTERFALL

FORMAT: **PS4** | DEVELOPER: **HOUSEMARQUE**
RELEASE: **16 AUG 2017**

As if one Housemarque release in a year wasn't enough, we get to enjoy *Matterfall* immediately after testing ourselves against *Nex Machina*. Bullet hell antics have their place in this platforming shooter too, as you jump and slide your away around a sci-fi setting, phasing through barriers and playing with Smart Matter – the alien material that lets you create and destroy platforms.



"A LOT OF OPEN WORLD GAMES REQUIRE YOU GOING OUT THERE AND FINDING STUFF, BUT WE'RE REALLY FOCUSSED ON BRINGING MORE OF THAT TO YOU"
DARREN CHISUM, SENIOR PROGRAMMER, BEND STUDIOS

DAYS GONE WILL BE DEFINED BY ITS OPEN WORLD

BEND STUDIOS REVEALS THE CHAOS UNRAVELLING IN THE WILDS

FORMAT: **PS4** | RELEASE: **2018** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SONY** | DEVELOPER: **BEND STUDIOS**

While it may be struggling to find an identity to call its own, sitting somewhere between *The Last Of Us* and *World War Z* in its execution, we're still immensely impressed by what we've seen of *Days Gone*. After taking a year out of the spotlight, Bend Studios has taken recent opportunities to cast attention onto the incredible tools and technology powering its upcoming, unapologetically gruff, open world survival game. The entire world is designed to be reactive – to your presence, progression and equipment; to the unpredictability of the Pacific Northwest; and to the litany of marauding survivors and infected creatures roaming the wilds. This is where *Days Gone* shows its true colours; in its world and the systems that power it – although we're still waiting to see how this combines with its cinematically driven storyline.

The Freaker zombies aren't the only threat in *Days Gone*. Sometimes, it's those that are still living that can pose the greatest threat to survival.



Days Gone features an expansive crafting system, with the studio promising that any items you can find in the game you can make, should you have the recipe and resources.

Ammo will be purposefully scarce in *Days Gone*, forcing you to utilise environmental traps and stealth to defeat and avoid enemies.

THE OPEN WORLD

With so much land to traverse, and with so many dangers out in the wilds, you'll need to pay special attention to the upkeep of protagonist Deacon St. John's motorbike. "It isn't a disposable tool to be replaced; it's an intrinsic part to the game experience, and a part of what makes Deacon who he is," said Bend Studios' Darren Chisum. After all, what kind of biker would ever be caught out in a catastrophe without their bike? "The motorbike is a huge part of the game. We're treating it as a part of Deacon. A lot of open world games have you get in a car, drive it for a bit, then leave it. The bike is a really important part of Deacon's personality, though," teases Chisum, noting how maintenance and fuel could be a constant concern for players as they look to expand their reach into the wilds. "He's crafted it himself over the past two years, and because it's a survival-based game, you'll have to keep it maintained, think about fuel and all that kind of thing."

WHATEVER THE WEATHER

WE CHAT TO DARREN CHISUM, SENIOR PROGRAMMER

[Q] What are you trying to achieve with *Days Gone*?
This is a game that takes place in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, two years after a pandemic has spread through the world. You play as Deacon St. John, who is an outlaw and a mercenary that has a background in a motorcycle club. That has given him the skills necessary to live in the brutal world that is *Days Gone*.

[Q] What is it that makes this world so 'brutal' then? And how will it impact Deacon as he moves through it?
The open world in *Days Gone* is really coming at the player. It's a very dangerous world, and we're trying to push that as hard as we can. A lot of open worlds have all these elements that you need to go out there and explore to find… and we still have that – but we're also bringing things *to* you! Ambushes, ropes across the road that clothesline Deacon… things like that are unpredictable, dynamic, and can happen at any time, all over the world.

[Q] The active day/night cycle is very impressive. How does it impact moment-to-moment play in the world?
The time of day impacts the population of the Freakers out in the world, and the awareness of the human Marauders. On top of this – and these can happen at any time in any weather – we've also got dynamic events, such as Runners, infected wolves, and Ragers, which are the infected bears. These infected animals aren't scripted; they happen in the world depending on what time of day it is, what you're doing in the world, and what the weather's doing, too. In general, the Freakers prefer night time and wetter environments, so that's always something you should keep in mind.

[Q] Will the entire world have a weather system, or will it work on a biome system?
Weather will exist across the whole world, and as you move through different regions – cascade mountains, evergreen forests, high desert, dry, high-elevation areas – you'll notice how it impacts each area differently. The Pacific Northwest gives us very different landscapes that are home to different wildlife sets, and that really does give us quite a lot to work with.

[Q] If two people play the game at the same time, would they each get the same weather in their experience?
No. It's totally variable.

[Q] Will the missions always have the same outcome?
Yes, every mission will have the same goal – the same end point – but there are a lot of different systems in *Days Gone* that just operate out in the open world, and those can play out in *so* many different ways depending on how you deal with them. The ambush clothesline is a good example of that, and there are many more that we've yet to reveal.

We have a dedicated team at Bend Studio that's making these kind of events and creating ways to place them around the world, depending on where the player is, what level they are, and what they're doing. It's not always going to be humans, it's not always going to be Freakers – it's sometimes going to be both, or animals might get involved. How they interact with each other depends on how the world is looking at the time.

[Q] How are you designing combat around such a reactive world?
[We call it] 'strategic sandbox combat'. You'll always have strategic options, no matter where you are, and you can always use things around you to complete a mission in the way that feels right to you. In the E3 trailer, you saw Deacon use a swarm to take out an enemy camp – thing is, there isn't always going to be a swarm about, so the next time I play through the game, I might have to take out the same outpost in stealth, because it's snowing, or it's daytime, and the Freakers aren't around to be used against the Marauders.

What we're really trying to get across in this game is that our dynamic open world and our strategic sandbox combat work together in unison really well to create a lot of variability and unique situations a player can find themselves in, and they have to figure out how to deal with them.



STATE OF DECAY 2
SLASHING AND STASHING

SID MEIER'S ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT** | DEVELOPER: **UNDEAD LABS** | RELEASE: **2018**



The Juggernaut is a huge, dangerous class of zombie that requires tactics and persistence to take down.

State of Decay isn't just another zombie game. It represents a niche; it's not just a zombie killing free for all, it's a zombie survival fantasy. Undead Labs is very aware of that, and the survival elements that captured the imaginations of over 4 million players in the first game have been exaggerated in the sequel, resulting in a game that basically feels like *Left4Dead* meets *Civilization*.

Survival is rarely a solitary endeavour, though: *State Of Decay 2* has introduced co-op this time around, making the potential for survival sandbox havoc all the more potent. In a hands-off demonstration, we saw a team of two developers team up to go and raid an abandoned police station and gather the resources necessary to build a new farm so that the fledgling community of survivors could be fed.

As it happened, the first dev's chosen character was a stuntman before the world fell apart, so he had natural skill with melee and better stamina than his ex-medic counterpart. The downside? This action hero was also a pretty bad snorer – this meant that if he slept in close proximity with other survivors, their morale would drop. "'If you had a community full of assholes, that would be pretty detrimental to the morale in general," explained the developer as he examined the passive-aggressive traits of another survivor.

There are more than a couple of hundred traits that each of your characters can have, which means that no two games anywhere in the world are ever going to pan out the same. You could meet a group of really chilled, focused survivors. Conversely, you could meet a crew of selfish, unhygienic bigots – and that's certainly going to make survival more of a chore.

> "YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO BE THE GOOD GUY"

That said, if you do position yourself in the middle of a society of questionable people, you don't always have to be the good guy. There are lots of other communities out there, and while some might not be outwardly hostile, they still might horde resources – you can choose to pilfer those in less honourable ways, if you choose. There are a lot of interesting choices in *State of Decay 2*.

Mixing this deep social mechanic with the same tight gameplay and high-stakes risk/reward gameplay loop the first game is known for is the best thing Undead Labs could have done for the sequel. It feels different enough from the previous game to be impactful, but parts of it are still familiar enough that the massive fanbase the game attracted since its launch isn't going to feel put out either. Undead Labs, you could say, is a master of survival.





The combat is as satisfying and crunchy as the first game, and of course you can still use car doors to take out zombies.



TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II EXPANDS THE REACH OF ITS CAMPAIGN

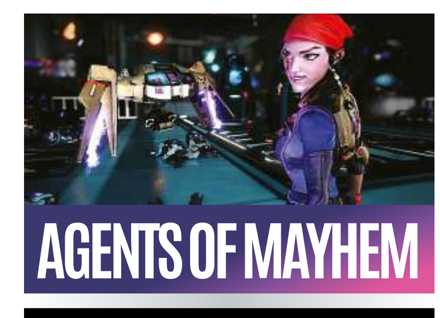
THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY CONTINUES TO IMPRESS WITH ITS LATEST RTS

FORMAT: **PC** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **SEGA** | DEVELOPER: **CREATIVE ASSEMBLY** | RELEASE: **28 SEP 2017**

The more of we see of it, the more we can see our time being swept away to the lands of Lustria and beyond. With Creative Assembly quickly working towards its 28 September release date, we are beginning to get a better idea of what to expect from this sequel and, despite a relatively quick turn around, the studio is absolutely packing *Total War: Warhammer II* with content. While we're still yet to get a full sense of the races available to play, what we've seen of Ulthuan, the home of the High Elves, and Lustria, where the Lizardmen have settled, is looking like plenty.

The campaign is a huge draw for *Warhammer II*, offering specific narrative-driven campaigns for every race – with each battling to save or destroy the Great Vortex – as well as more nuanced control over armies and positioning, not to mention a proper amount of endgame content to consider. Creative Assembly has once again assembled a package that transcends both history and licence, offering a tactically varied and incredibly deep RTS ahead of everything else, layering fan service on once the core elements have been made as good as they possibly can be.



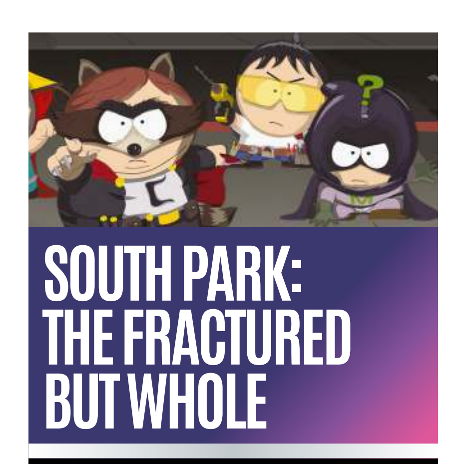


AGENTS OF MAYHEM

THIS SAINT'S ROW SPIN-OFF IS STILL HAPPENING

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **NO**
PUBLISHER: **DEEP SILVER** | DEVELOPER: **VOLITION**
RELEASE: **15 AUG 2017**

If you've got a Saints Row-shaped hole in your heart the latest release from Volition may just fill it with *Agents Of Mayhem*. Taking place in the official Saints Row multiverse (don't ask), this chaotic shooter desperately wants to inject some new life into the franchise and it's *so close* to doing so. Taking a team of three members out – the ability to switch between them on the fly is as fluid as you'd hope – is a fun diversion from the Saints Row monotony, but it's still difficult to see how *Agents Of Mayhem* will define itself outside of being a stopgap for the inevitable main series sequel. It's entertainingly boisterous, but we're still waiting to see its originality and flair in action.



SOUTH PARK: THE FRACTURED BUT WHOLE

CONTROVERSY CONTINUES TO RISE

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | 4K: **NO**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT SAN FRANCISCO** | RELEASE: **17 OCT 2017**

The kids have embraced super heroics this time around and it's already stirring up some trouble. In classic South Park fashion, a lot of the potential enjoyment for this game is going to stem from your threshold for offensive comedy and naughty words. Still, at its core Ubisoft San Francisco – taking over from Obsidian, developer of predecessor *Stick Of Truth* – has made a number of notable changes to the underlying systems, deepening the RPG mechanics and overhauling the battle system to give it more strategic depth. *The Fractured But Hole* looks like a fun adventure and a wonderful companion to the TV show, but its mileage will depend entirely on your level of fandom – a strange position for Ubisoft to be in.

War mode's multi-stage setup and ever-escalating danger reinforces a sense of teamwork COD has been missing for years.

CALL OF DUTY: WWII TURNS BACK THE CLOCK

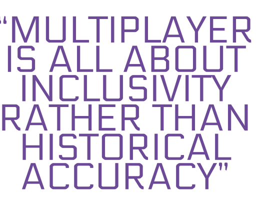
HOW RETURNING TO THE PAST HAS HELPED REINVENT A STAGNANT MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE

Multiplayer maps will include Berlin, Normandy, Gibraltar and many more as *COD:WWII* takes in a huge theatre of war.

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC, PS4** | 4K: **YES** | PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES** | RELEASE: **3 NOV 2017**

As Activision dials back the clock and softly reboots the triple-A franchise that's ruled the shooter roost for well over decade, it's clear *Advanced Warfare* developer Sledgehammer Games really wants to hark back to the series' good old days. And with a just a taster of its new approach to multiplayer showcased at E3, we're excited to see that what's old has finally become new again.

The classic multiplayer modes you know and love return – so you'll still get to run around in TDM and the like – but it's the new additions that are causing a real stir. War mode is COD's answer to Battlefield's long-serving Conquest scenarios - a fresh multiplayer experience that pits two teams of players as they battle through three interconnected missions. One such setup sees players fighting up a hill to secure a truck in one section, battling to hold back the enemy while building a bridge in the next and protecting a tank as it crosses in the finale. The team-based orientation smacks of *Overwatch*, but we all want more from online shooters than simple deathmatches, so the arrival of War Mode is a positive sign for the series.



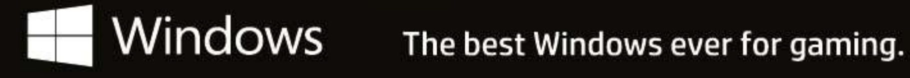
Sledgehammer has also taken great pains to address the fact that you'll once again be playing as the Axis in multiplayer. And while Swastikas will appear in the game's story campaign (where you'll exclusively play as the Allies, including a female member of the French Resistance), that particular symbol will be absent from online play. Since avatars are fully customisable - whether they be Axis or Allies - you'll also be able to play as a non-white German while fighting in Nazi colours. Sledgehammer says multiplayer is all about inclusivity rather than historical accuracy, and it hopes the balance it's struck will promote that mindset when it goes live in November.

COD:WWII's story campaign has also been given an overhaul, with the almost ubiquitous health generation system the series helped make so commonplace now traded for a medkit system (much like those used in the original WW2 games). It makes firefights a lot more intense, although you'll often be in a squad with a medic you can rely on for on-call health relief. The bulk of the story will take place across France, Belgium and Germany, and while it's as set-piece-driven as the modern or futuristic COD of today, the absence of exo suits and wall-running makes everything feel retro chic.



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OVERWATCH
WORLD CUP
2017







BRITISH STEEL

WE VISIT WARGAMING SAINT PETERSBURG TO SEE THE EXTRAORDINARY LENGTHS THE STUDIO GOES TO IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP WORLD OF WARSHIPS AFLOAT

I'M SORRY, BUT CAN I LEAVE YOU HERE?" GAME DESIGNER DANIL PAVLOV ASKS US, INTERRUPTING A QUESTION JUST A HANDFUL OF MINUTES INTO OUR INTERVIEW, HURRIED BY THE RINGING OF A MOBILE PHONE THAT HAS QUICKLY GRADUATED FROM HIS POCKET TO THE TABLE. GAMES™ HAS, IT WOULD SEEM, PICKED THE WRONG DAY TO VISIT LESTA STUDIO – THE SAINT PETERSBURG BASED ARM OF THE WARGAMING DEVELOPMENT MACHINE. "There is a big problem with PvE," he says, looking hurriedly from us to a colleague to his right. "We had a patch go live this morning but we've had a huge issue." We smile and wave as he sprints from the room, pulling the phone up to his ear as he disappears around a corner; this office is a labyrinth with armed security stationed at every door. "Well shit – I know what I'll be doing for the rest of the day then," laughs *World Of Warships* captain Artur Plociennik, shaking his head as he turns to face us. "You're in the middle of a combat zone today."

"Well, every day is a challenge, right?" we sheepishly return fire, attempting to placate the executive producer – the last thing we want is to be ejected out of the studio and onto the streets of Russia, under the current circumstances. A wry smile creeps across his face; a veteran of these wars, waged daily as part of the ongoing struggle to maintain a game as a live service, he's seen all of this before. "Oh, you don't know the half of it," he chuckles, knowing that, somewhere, in a room two floors down, the few are having to answer the complaints of the many while others work to steady the ship.

Wargaming has navigated plenty of these storms in the past, getting it down to something of an art form. Because, after close to two years of active service, managing millions of active players and overseeing billions of battles waged and shots fired on the open seas, *World Of Warships* is very much the warzone that it was when it first launched in September of 2015. There are days where the team wishes it were different, but then this, we're assured, is all part of the fun. "There are days I wish we had just shipped a boxed product and could just be done with it," Plociennik admits, laughing still. "I think that's the same for all developers. But on the other hand it's amazing to see how your product evolves in this environment, to be able to fix things that you didn't get *just* right the first time around… I think it's cool."

World Of Warships, much like its older siblings *World Of Tanks* and *World Of Warplanes*, are videogames that are destined to never be content complete. Constantly evolving products attempting to keep a, frankly, ridiculous number of players engaged – with their wallets wide open – in just about every region of the world. If you placed a dot on a map that has a stable broadband connection running to it, you are likely to find a person with a Wargaming username within a short walking distance.

And while *World Of Tanks* continues to steal most of the attention, it is perhaps *World Of Warships* that is receiving the most dutiful updates and attention within the company. While we are visiting the sprawling Russian studio, the team is preparing to add a new line of British battleships to its ever-expanding roster of famous naval vessels. It's finishing up a set of ships and scenarios designed to tie in with Christopher Nolan's hotly anticipated *Dunkirk*, and, yes, it's trying to get its new PvE Scenarios to work on the live servers – special



modes with their own stories and tasks, built to sit alongside the hugely popular PvP and co-op battles of old.

"Our players often ask us 'Are you going to do this? Well, what about this?' Well, of course we are going to do all of that *eventually*, it's just a matter of when," continues Plociennik, who is only too aware that managing the expectations of such a large player base is a difficulty unto itself. "It's definitely not an easy task and, in the last few years, we've had to make at least a few milestone decisions – in terms of what development direction we need to take the game – and one of these led to us prioritising PvE development," he says, adding, "Which we are releasing – or not releasing, as might be the case – right now."

PvE has been given a larger presence in the *World Of Warships* experience, typically dominated by seven versus seven PvP team combat, because the studio recognised that there was one element of its game that it wasn't servicing to the best of its ability, that its analytics can guide it towards the content that will best serve the wider and niche contingencies of the player base. "There was a self-contained audience for that type of experience. But it was big enough for us to say, 'Well, these people are clearly not here for the PvP battles, and they are still paying and playing the game, so that means that this is an experience that we need to provide for them,'" he says, noting that this will allow the team to bring even more authenticity and varied gameplay to *World Of Warships,* and in a way that it has never been able to do before.

What was surprising to learn, however, for as quickly as many of these day-to-day service problems can be addressed, every decision to bring new content to *World Of Warships* must be made years in advance. The studio is slavishly dedicated to authenticity, to ensuring that *World Of Warships* is not only a playground for indulging in destructive tendencies but an educational experience, too – in a way that, to be honest, almost seems to border on obsessive, as amazing as the final result might be.

"Most people don't really realise the amount of time that it actually takes to make our ships this accurate. All the research and the background work that is done before [the artists] can even start working on it," notes Plociennik, as we inquire about the addition of battleships such as the HMS Nelson and HMS King George V. "For the line up of ships that we want to release in 2017/2018, we made that decision at the end of December [2016]," considers Plociennik, and the reason why is astounding.

An artist will work on individual ships by themselves, totally immersing themselves in every element of its design. They take control of the sourcing of blueprints of the ships from museums (or in some cases, working with internal naval engineers to draw up their own), working with research teams to become au fait with every element of the ship (mechanically and aesthetically), before eventually modelling and texturing the ship to an astonishing level of detail, as close to 1:1 with the real thing as humanly possible.

"For a Destroyer, the smallest type of ship class that we have and also the least detailed, it is around two months of man hours," Plociennik continues. "And for Carriers and Battleships it is more like six to eight months of production work in terms of man hours. You can imagine that for research time it can take anywhere from one month to a year as well," he says, laughing that this is often delayed due to outside elements; the British archives the studio secures from the Imperial War Museum are a particular bug bear, as each of the British ship blueprints must be first digitised, a process the museum refuses to outsource. "They do it in-house, and they take their sweet time with it. We had to postpone British ships a few times because they were not ready to send us high-res images of a few ships."

The devil is in the detail, Wargaming says, and most of it is incidental, elements that the average player wouldn't even spot while trying to measure shot placement or positioning to avoid enemy fire in the heat of battle. Who is obsessing over the placement of chains on the deck, the types of screws and bolts in the hull, and ascertaining where rust might form on the ship while enemy torpedoes are careering towards you? As it should happen, it's actually one of the largest portions of the audience.

"We often have disagreements with our community about this," says Plociennik when we question whether the balance swings in favour of building fun gameplay or historical authenticity. "We have quite a vocal community of players who are interested in the historical part and they would sacrifice everything to get the historical part right," he adds, noting that the average player age is 35, with a vast majority of the activity coming out of China, Russia, the UK and the USA. They are as interested in learning about these ships, about seeing them fully realised, as they are actually playing the game – the fact that it's an immediate and fun experience is just an added bonus.

> "FOR A DESTROYER, THE SMALLEST TYPE OF SHIP CLASS THAT WE HAVE AND ALSO THE LEAST DETAILED, IT IS AROUND TWO MONTHS OF MAN HOURS"

"Sometimes we do [have to] sacrifice parts of the historical pillar to feed the gameplay. But then we do try to be as true to history as we can within the framework of still being able to provide a good gameplay experience," says Plociennik, and that's all part of the magic of *World Of Warships*. It's a game that so often gets overlooked due to its status as a free-to-play affair, but the reality is that it commands a devilishly large player base, with some of the most authentic and stunning assets in the entire industry. It even, we can report, has a working PvE mode now – at the time of writing at least. "We managed to be transformative with [*World Of Warships*], to do our own thing and adapt to what our players wanted. To give them gameplay that was more in line with the experience of naval combat that everybody has romanticised and envisioned, rather than just the same gameplay of *World Of Tanks*... It's kind of amazing."



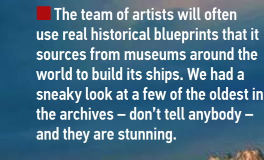


It can take a single artist the better part of a year to research, model and texture a new ship before it even gets into the hands of a game designer.









The team of artists will often use real historical blueprints that it sources from museums around the world to build its ships. We had a sneaky look at a few of the oldest in the archives – don't tell anybody – and they are stunning.









The addition of PvE content means *World Of Warships* can now introduce historically accurate game scenarios, such as a mode tying in with the release of Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*.

FINDING THE FUN IN AUTHENTICITY

While Wargaming approaches *World Of Warships* with unwavering dedication to authenticity, the studio is also keenly aware that it needs to create a fun videogame experience around historical accuracy. It isn't an interactive application, so concessions need to be made in support of that. "It's something that we are unwilling to do," says Plociennik, as we question whether the team would ever make sweeping changes to the combat to service a particular ship's design or weapon sets. "Because, at the core of the game experience, it still has to be a viable game – fun and fair in a PvP environment."

"In the end, we are arbitrarily assigning gameplay values to historical realties, and in history, who could say whether X amount of environmental factors would contribute to a battle," he continues, noting that while the team might be trying (and in most cases, succeeding) to create the most authentic looking ships in the world, it is able to take a few liberties with how they handle on the ocean. This isn't a simulation, after all, it's an action game where you take hulking machines into battle.

World Of Warships is about creating a romanticised version of battleship combat – fulfilling the dream of what naval combat might have been like, without the difficulties of navigation or colossally laboured build-up times. "It's the most important thing for us, that we want people to believe that this is actually how it could have been."

Digital: A Love Story

Amie Workbench. Version 1.3.

Using Your New Modem

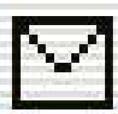
Message from: Mr. Wong

Hey, Chris, so you have you
computer set up. I thought
Mr. Horenstein's kid, I'd th
a little something extra: the
dialer for your modem attac
this message. If you plug it
the phone line, you can use
dial BBSes.

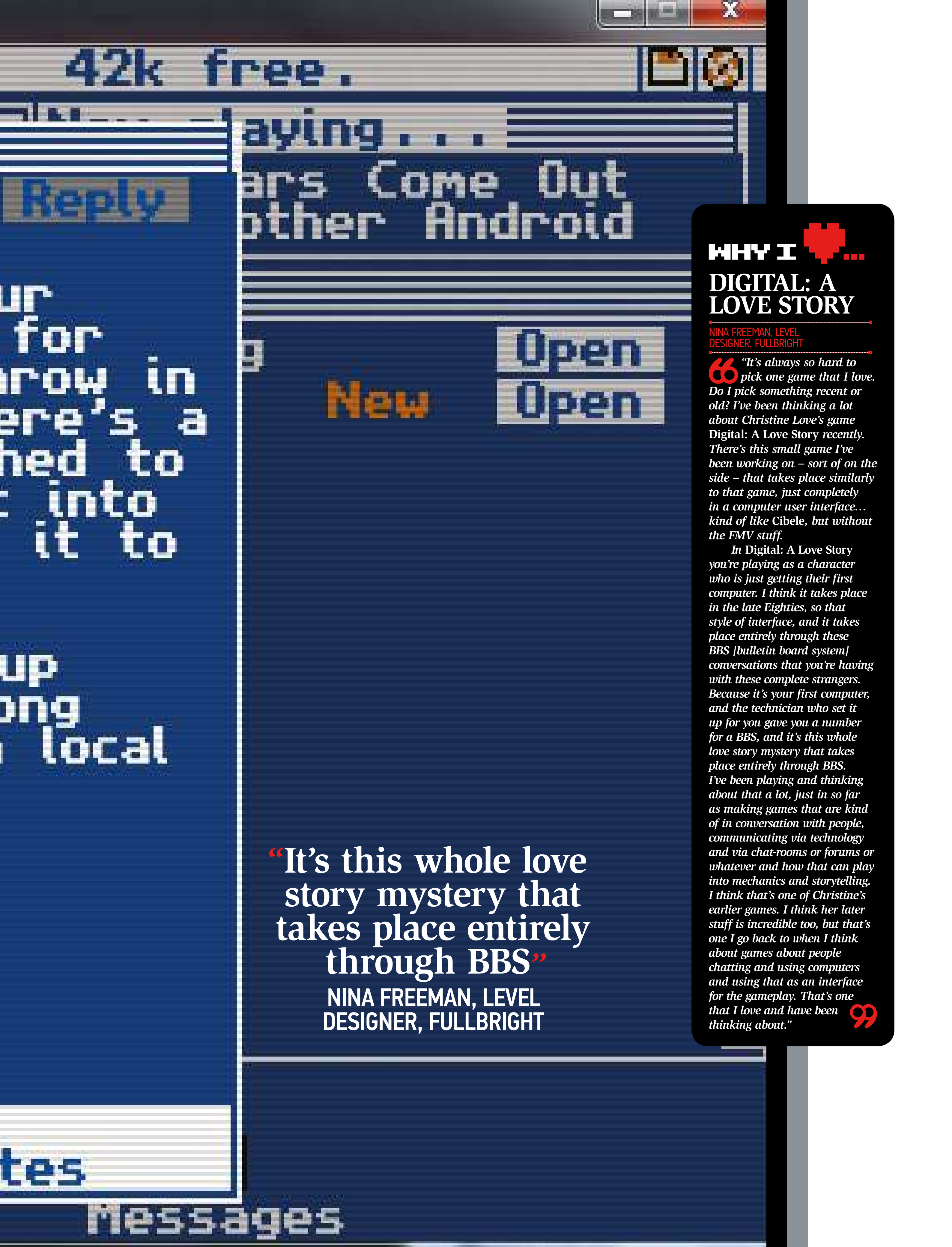
Just make sure not to run
your dad's phone bill with lo
distance calls, OK? Here's a
BBS I recommend looking at:
698-5519.

Enjoy,

George Wong
Wong Computers



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"It's this whole love story mystery that takes place entirely through BBS"

NINA FREEMAN, LEVEL DESIGNER, FULLBRIGHT

WHY I ❤...

DIGITAL: A LOVE STORY

NINA FREEMAN, LEVEL DESIGNER, FULLBRIGHT

"It's always so hard to pick one game that I love. Do I pick something recent or old? I've been thinking a lot about Christine Love's game Digital: A Love Story *recently. There's this small game I've been working on – sort of on the side – that takes place similarly to that game, just completely in a computer user interface… kind of like* Cibele*, but without the FMV stuff.*

In Digital: A Love Story *you're playing as a character who is just getting their first computer. I think it takes place in the late Eighties, so that style of interface, and it takes place entirely through these BBS [bulletin board system] conversations that you're having with these complete strangers. Because it's your first computer, and the technician who set it up for you gave you a number for a BBS, and it's this whole love story mystery that takes place entirely through BBS. I've been playing and thinking about that a lot, just in so far as making games that are kind of in conversation with people, communicating via technology and via chat-rooms or forums or whatever and how that can play into mechanics and storytelling. I think that's one of Christine's earlier games. I think her later stuff is incredible too, but that's one I go back to when I think about games about people chatting and using computers and using that as an interface for the gameplay. That's one that I love and have been thinking about."*



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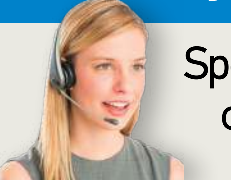
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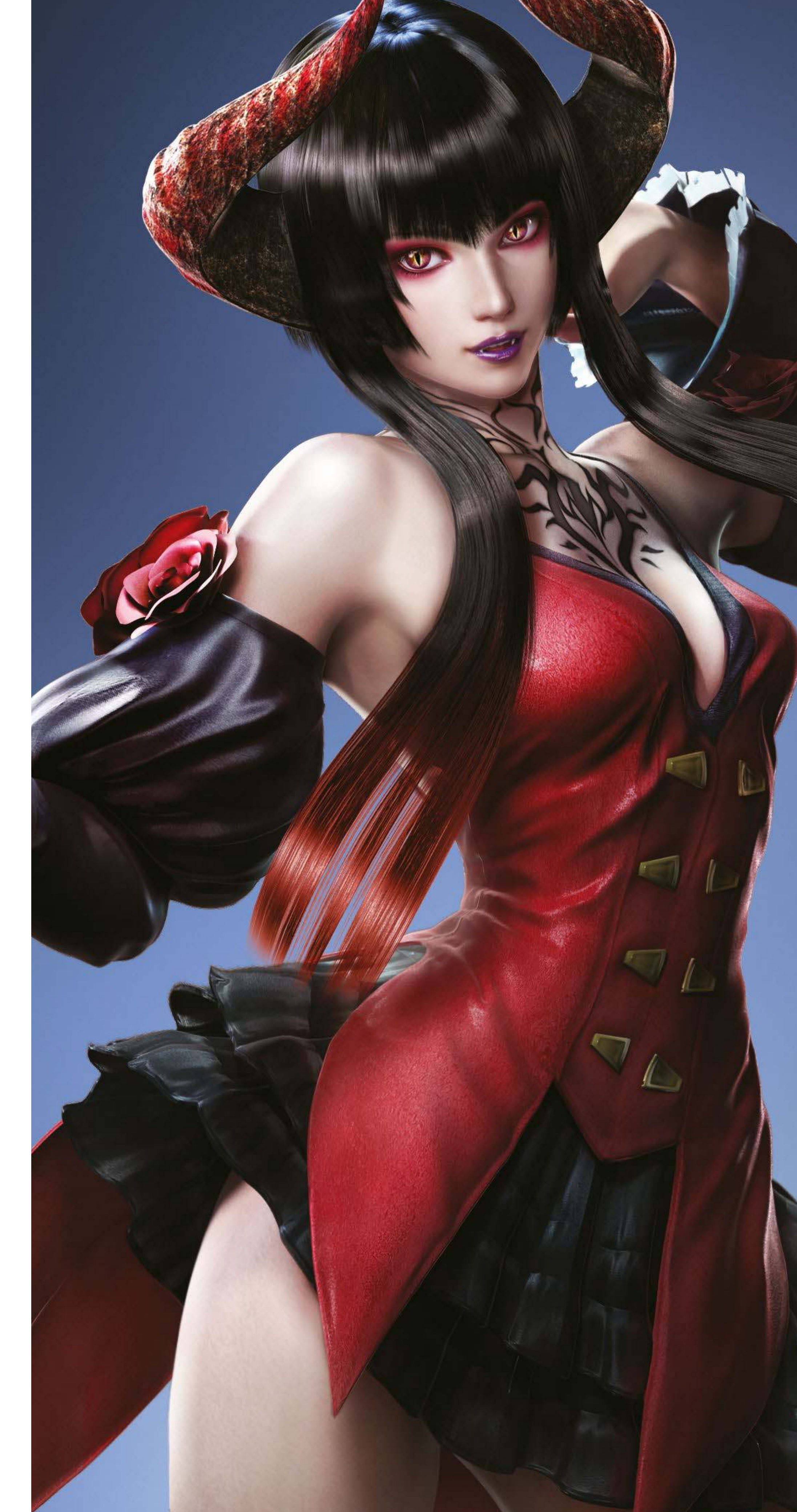
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Reviews



70

TEKKEN 7

The legendary brawler is back with VR features and more, but does it still pack a punch



THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and, of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest. We'd never let that happen, and besides, you'd smell it a mile off. Finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact. They are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists designed to enlighten, inform and engage – the gospel according to **games™**.













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Above: Some teething problems during *Tekken 7*'s launch meant finding matches online took longer than expected. A painful experience combined with the already-long loading times, but thankfully, online is much healthier now.

I'M STILL STANDING

Tekken 7

Credit where it's due. In an industry shaped by rapid evolution, cut-throat publishers demanding unrealistic sales numbers and gimmicky innovation, *Tekken* has stood the test of time. Even more impressive is how *Tekken* has survived without ever really having to change.

It's no surprise, then, that *Tekken 7* is another quiet evolution anchored by Heihachi Mishima's family turmoil, low attacks to win the round and Paul's deathfist causing anguished cries of "how much damage?!" For those who have kept up with the series, *Tekken*'s most recent outings have come in the form of the enormous *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* and free-to-play experiment *Tekken Revolution*. *Tekken 7* falls somewhere between the two. It has shed the 'bound' combo system of *TTT2*, where certain moves spiked opponents into the ground and allowed for varied follow-ups, opting instead for the far more fluid and organic combo system of *Tekken Revolution*.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PS4
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Bandai Namco
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

The main difference comes from the addition of Rage Art and Rage Drives moves. When your health gets low enough, your character enters 'Rage', a buff that adds a damage bonus to all your moves that lasts until the end of the round. In *Tekken 7*, 'Rage' can be spent on a Rage Art (an attack that leads to a small cutscene when it connects) and Rage Drive (a powerful blue-shaded version of a normal move). Both Rage moves will infuriate newcomers who will almost certainly cry "CHEAP!" as they get caught out by these moves time and time again, as they continue to smash buttons even when the opponent enters Rage. But that's where its real value comes in. Once players learn they can't attack opponents in Rage quite as carelessly as before, it becomes clear that the real value of Rage comes from the breathing space it affords the losing player, as its threat means attackers have to play around it.

TEKKEN 7 GETS THE FUNDAMENTALS RIGHT; IT APPEALS TO NEWCOMERS AS MUCH AS IT DOES TO VETERANS

Outside of that, it's just nip and tuck to the game engine, such as the addition of Power Crush moves that 'absorb' blows during their start-up and how regular throws can now be broken with either punch button, weakening their overall threat. Indeed, the most dramatic gameplay changes come from the addition of Akuma and Eliza, two characters who hint at what the *Tekken X Street Fighter* project might one day look like. Both characters build meter, spending it on EX moves and move cancels, and can attack from the air with dive kicks and jump-in attacks.

None of the other new faces are quite that dramatic, ranging from the familiar (Josie has Bruce's moves, Kazumi has Mishima's trademark attacks) to the ineffective (Gigas



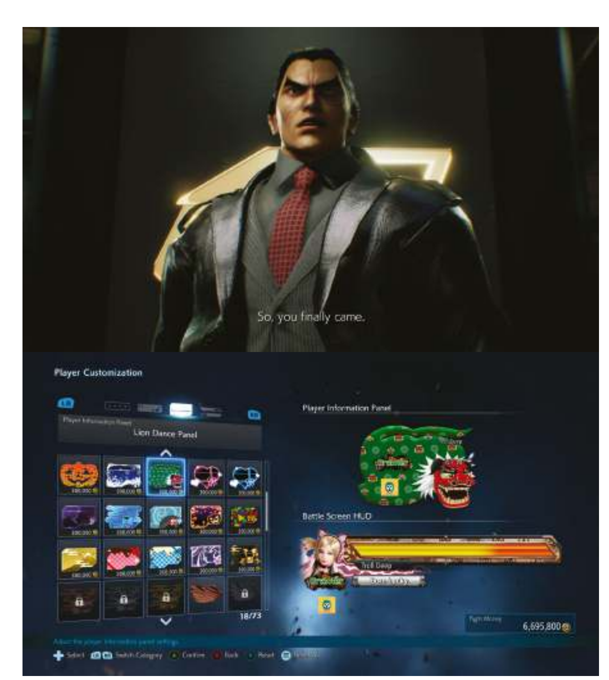
Right: Although the customisation unlocks are disappointing, there's just about enough scope to create some fun outfits, such as Akuma in tropical summer garb, Panda and Kuma as military soldiers, and tributes to *Street Fighter* characters.

FAQs

Q. ARE ALL CHARACTERS UNLOCKED STRAIGHT AWAY?
Yes, every character including Akuma is unlocked except for Eliza, who is a pre-order bonus.

Q. DO COMBOS TAKE FOREVER?
It's long been a criticism of the series and combos in *Tekken 7* generally feel shorter and less damaging than they did in *TTT2*.

Q. HOW GOOD ARE ONLINE PLAYERS?
Early ranks are full of button-mashers but there's a very sudden increase in skill after the early Dan ranks. Veterans have clearly flocked here.



and Lucky Chloe both prop up the bottom of tier lists) to the unusual (Claudio's Starburst powering up certain moves).

But none of these characters or changes have had an impact on the trademark ebb and flow of each *Tekken* match, where both players use skittish movement to tempt their opponent into an ill-advised attack, using that as an opening to press their own offence. *Tekken* doesn't feel quite as intense as *Virtua Fighter*'s up-close guessing games, nor as buttons-friendly as *Dead Or Alive*. It's somewhere between the two, placing a much bigger premium on maintaining the right space and knowing when to press buttons when an up-close battle finally erupts. *Tekken*'s genius is that you *can* learn the frame data, optimum punishes and hitboxes to squeeze the most from the game, but that you don't *have* to. The slick animation, easy commands and eye-catching FX make *Tekken 7* a rollercoaster for all levels of play.

As fun as the main game is, the package lets it down. There's been a big push from Bandai Namco to promote 'The Mishima Saga', the story at the heart of *Tekken 7*. It's given main billing in the menu, separate from the clutter off the Offline modes, and it's dominated the promotion leading up to release. From a publisher point of view, it's understandable why Bandai Namco has pushed the story, given *Tekken 7* made its debut in Japanese arcades more than two years ago and needs to bring something fresh to console owners. But the story just never really clicks. Besides some cute QTE moments, Akuma's appearance and the explanation of Heihachi's backstory, it feels unfocused, too often indulging odd diversions such as the faceless reporter covering the Mishimas and side stories that feel like excuses to bring in fringe characters.

The biggest disappointment comes from the character customisation. Outside the online killing grounds where players fight over ranks, Treasure Battle is the one mode likely to keep single players plugging away. However, the customisation unlocks found here are weak. Too many are generic unlocks shared across all characters and too many are repeats from previous *Tekken* games. There's just about enough flexibility here to put together some imaginative ensembles and fun tributes – *Street Fighter*'s Cody and Skeletor are a few of the costumes that we've seen online – but the unlocks don't have the impact of those in *Injustice 2*.

Vitally, *Tekken 7* gets the fundamentals right. The gameplay is fast and fluid, online ticks along without any lag issues (despite teething problems with finding matches) and outside of a hopeless bottom tier, the balance is solid. It's a fighting game that manages to appeal to newcomers who just want to smash buttons as much as it does veterans, who will spend hours in training mode finding optimum counter-hit combos against side-turned characters against the wall. It's a game that deserves a meatier and healthier package than the one Bandai Namco has given it, but even so, the online play will see *Tekken 7* endure as one of the best fighting games this generation.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

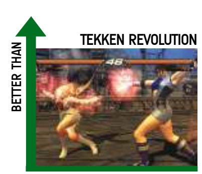
TRAINING ONLINE: You can practice your moves while matchmaking searches for your next opponent. It's a nice idea but we'd welcome more of the training mode options here, particularly the ability to call up a moves list and switch on Counter Hit.

GET PRACTICING

While it's disappointing to see another fighting game come and go without an in-depth tutorial to guide new players through the finer points of how to play fighting games, there can be no faulting Practice Mode. This is the absolute gold standard for fighting games, with enough options to make any EVO contender salivate. Options extended as far as starting position, multiple counter-hits, CPU actions such as Crouch and Follow, up to five input commands and there's even an input delay option. There's a huge emphasis on knowing what moves you can punish and what to punish them with and Practice Mode makes it easy to set this up on your own without having to find frame data online. The intricacies will be lost on newcomers, who will only really visit this mode to stomp through the moves list, but for fighting game veterans, the wealth of options here is incredible.

BETTER THAN

TEKKEN REVOLUTION





INJUSTICE 2

WORSE THAN



PREDICTABLY GOOD IF DISAPPOINTINGLY SLENDER

MISSING THE MARK

Rime

It's difficult to get a read on an experience that is as deliberately opaque as this. Developer Tequila Works has designed and arranged *Rime* to be a journey through the psyche; an emotional crawl through the five stages of grief, composed in such a way that the more of yourself you give to it, the more you'll walk away with. At least, that's the desired effect. In principle, *Rime* is quite the accomplishment, with gorgeous audio and visual design helping to create a mesmerising atmosphere that won't be soon forgotten. But it's in practice that *Rime* begins to unravel, struggling to find a consistent balance between freedom and structure.

As a player, we want the freedom and autonomy to explore the gorgeous world that Tequila Works has created. Each of the presented areas are a visual delight, pure and honest locales that demand your attention and crave appreciation. But the structure of *Rime* is rigid, and too often unappealing, focused on achieving a lofty narrative goal that is never clearly defined and sparsely expressed.

Across its four main acts, *Rime* presents a disparate array of gameplay threads in an effort to deliver a varied experience within its strictly contained narrative. Those threads are frayed by the form; *Rime* conveys its story and direction without a word, a silent protagonist cast out on a mysterious island with nothing but intuition and intrigue to guide them forward. Like *Ico* and *Journey* before it, the absence of common visual identifiers – such as an HUD, any dialogue or written text – only serves to build a sense of isolation and mystery, goading you deeper into the web.

The story is told gradually through an orchestral swell, the lingering look on an environmental marker, murals painted throughout the world and, occasionally, flashbacks that feel more like moments of lucid transcendence than accurate depictions of the past. Still, unlike the aforementioned,

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, PC
ORIGIN: Spain
PUBLISHER: Grey Box
DEVELOPER: Tequila Works
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN
THOMAS WAS ALONE



WORSE THAN
JOURNEY



Above: *Rime* uses smart visual navigation cues to guide you around its world. Stark colour shifts and swells of the beautiful score often signify that you are heading in the right direction.

Below: This is clearly a project of passion for Tequila Works, and the love and dedication poured into the environments is clear. Not that that excuses some technical issues that are prevalent throughout, such as consistent framerate drops.

RIME PRESENTS A DISPARATE ARRAY OF GAMEPLAY THREADS IN AN EFFORT TO DELIVER A VARIED EXPERIENCE



FAQs

Q. IS THIS THE NEW JOURNEY?

It is not. While *Journey* and *Ico* feel like clear inspiration, *Rime* is far more simplistic in its execution.

Q. OKAY, SO IT'S THE NEW WITNESS?

Wait, what? Where do you get this stuff from? No, the puzzles are very simplistic, no graph paper necessary.

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?

Expect to spend between eight and 12 hours playing *Rime*. It depends on how much you want to explore for collectibles.

Below: *Rime* features no dialogue and that means much of its story is left open to interpretation. Sadly, it drops its reveals too late in the game for it to have any real weight or consequence.



a lot of this is upended by shallow (and infrequently frustrating) puzzle design, a lot of which has a habit of breaking immersion. That's something that is difficult to re-establish once it's lost, but imperative in an experience such as this.

The artistry of *Rime* is clear and to be commended, but it's as the veil of immersion comes crashing down that the flaws begin to impede on the overall experience. Tequila Works has spoken in the past of its desire to simplify its puzzle mechanics – so as ensure that all players could complete the game without needing to divert their attention – but the majority are so simple or outright monotonous that they begin to feel like busywork, merely impeding discovery rather than fostering a stronger sense of it.

An array of hidden collectibles can pull you off the critical path, but *Rime* does little to suggest you can or should. When presented with such beautiful, naturalistic areas, the inclination is to explore, but so limited are your interaction opportunities, that pressing onward can feel like the only option worth taking. That's because *Rime* wants you to build momentum – to feel a sense of completion and contemplation at every stage of the game – but in essence you are simply moving steadily forward, ambling from destination to destination with little purpose or resolve.

It's clearly a game built with a lot of heart and grand storytelling ambitions, but it falls on the shoulders of the game's final hour to take responsibility for the ten that preceded them – retroactivity giving context and meaning to events that otherwise passed with little explanation or grounding. It's an ambitious idea, but arrives too late to have any real effect or emotional weight. Instead, you'll be left feeling a little cold, wondering if you've missed a beat or whether your heart has simply turned to stone.

The reality is that *Rime* is certainly ambitious, and often mesmerising, but too much of it feels at odds with the demands of a videogame. Consider *Journey*, reaching the shimmering mountain a constant goal to strive towards; *Rime* lacks that obvious and instinctual drive forward towards eventual resolve. Instead *Rime* seems at times content to let you bask in its beauty and at others pained to push you through it all; the position and placement of the rare characters goading you on through the game are essentially left unresolved too, staggering considering their shadow and looming presence throughout.

Baffling still are the array of technical problems we encountered while playing *Rime* on Xbox One. The game may be simplistic by its very nature, but it sure does struggle when it comes to texture load-in and holding a stable framerate. This can range from casual annoyance to an immersion-shattering disruption as you attempt to do something as simple as move the camera while climbing only to encounter sever frame drops. The PS4 version seems to fair a little better, but it's still at odds with the otherwise serene nature of the game.

Rime puts us in a difficult position. In many ways, it is enchanting. The music and sound direction is phenomenal and (optimisation issues aside) it's one of the most visually appealing games of the year – a real treat – with the two combining to create moments of wonder and fear, tension and anguish. But *Rime* is missing the vital ingredient that made its forefathers legend; it's an emotional journey with a lot of heart but no soul.



MOMENTS OF BEAUTY UPENDED BY UNEVEN PACING

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

STORYTELLING DEVICE – *Rime* needed a better way of conveying its narrative, a tool to deliver story that didn't disrupt its pace or flow.

REMNANTS OF THE PAST

***Rime*'s development problems are well documented by now, but what's interesting is that you can see the remnants of its past iterations in there to this day. The voice modulation now replaced by a contextual shout that shifts depending on the objects surrounding you, and the placement of fruit, now used to bait animals rather than feed survival meters. *Rime* has been many years in development and the attention to environmental detail is clear, but it's still interesting to consider what could have been. As it stands, *Rime* is a quiet, contemplative and combatless adventure with hints of something grander simmering beneath the surface.**



THE ULTIMATE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Farpoint



DETAILS

FORMAT: PSVR
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Impulse Gear
PRICE: £49.99 (£74.99 with controller)
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (1-2 online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

We've had some sensational experiences in PSVR since it launched last October and it still hasn't lost its power to amaze us. *Farpoint* is the next 'proper VR game' (not a term we're fans of) and it's a thrilling rollercoaster ride that offers one of the console's most immersive VR experiences.

That's not to say that Impulse Gear's game immediately grabs you. Instead, it slowly eases you in to your new role, giving you the barest amount of control that's critical for those new to the VR experience, but may frustrate those with sturdier VR legs. It's important for several reasons as it not only sets up *Farpoint*'s well-narrated story, in which you and two astronauts get transported to an unknown planet via a mysterious wormhole, but also lets you get to grips with Sony's new peripheral.

Sturdily made, the PSVR Aim Controller feels assuredly solid in use and effortlessly enables you to explore *Farpoint*'s gorgeous environments. The front analogue stick lets you move forwards and backwards and strafe, while the rear stick (which is locked in default settings) lets you look around. It initially feels foreign and is bound to play havoc with those with little VR experience, but the carefully constructed pace of the game allows you to painlessly adapt. By *Farpoint*'s epic finale, when you're running in one direction, firing in another and simultaneously looking in yet another location for enemy fire, you'll wonder how you've ever lived without it. The power of VR is that it's difficult to grasp how a type of game might work until you're fully immersed in it, and we're giddy with excitement at the thought of just how special a game like *Battlefield VR* could be.

And *Farpoint* truly is an exciting experience, offering the same constant 'oh my god' moments that you would have encountered the first time you put that PSVR helmet on. It introduces a solid selection of weapons, from shotguns to sniper rifles, which can be easily switched between with a simple cock of your controller; there are a variety of foes to battle, from scary-ass spiders to gigantic metallic behemoths, and the story is surprisingly engaging, drawing you deeper and deeper into the convincing world that Impulse Gear has constructed.

Yes, it features some basic enemy AI, a serious lack of replay outside of its fun co-op mode and is not far off being an on-rails shooter, but it's still an amazingly fun experience. And when you're occasionally let off those rails and allowed to run wild in some of the larger open areas, it culminates in one of the most freeing experiences that PSVR has so far offered.

BETTER THAN

THE BROOKHAVEN EXPERIMENT



WORSE THAN



SUPERHOT VR

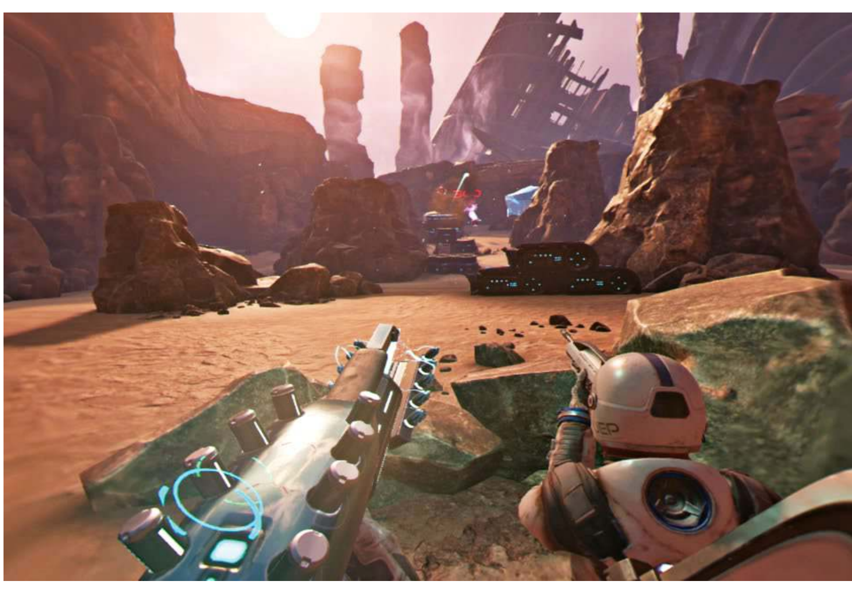
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

STOP AND START The biggest issue we've had with *Farpoint* is that it features some incredibly poor checkpoints. It's often unclear when the game has saved, meaning much frustration when you're thrown back a good distance.

VERDICT 8/10

FIRST-PERSON VR SHOOTERS HAVE JUST LEVELLED UP



Above: The bespoke co-op mode is an excellent bonus, giving *Farpoint* additional legs once you've completed the main story and exhausted replaying through its levels. The point-based mode throws a continual threat of ever-nastier enemies at you in the hope of grinding you down before you can get to each other's aid.



NINTENDO'S NEW BRAWLER HAS COMPETITIVE LEGS

Arms

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Switch
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4 online
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

Nintendo always does things its own way, doesn't it? In *Arms*, it's created what is essentially a more direct take on the fighting genre than its own Smash Bros games. Despite appearing quite different, if you dig into the mechanics it's clear that it shares quite a lot with the 'mixup' mechanics that are present in most beat-'em-ups.

It's very 'new Nintendo' aesthetically, sharing a lot of the same colours and themes with other recent IP *Splatoon*, and it's clearly the best-looking game on the Switch. The superbly animated characters are a diverse bunch, each bringing a different skill to the dance that makes them all feel quite different to play.

Ribbon Girl can jump repeatedly, Master Mummy doesn't take any 'hitstun' and can push his way towards his opponents, while the face of *Arms* – Spring Man – gets his fists automatically charged when he's nearly out of health. You can modify the characters further by popping different fists onto the ends of their arms, from homing missiles that aid with accuracy to great big wrecking balls that smash through opponents' attacks. Finding your favourite character/fist loadout is extremely satisfying, and tweaking it to win certain matchups is where *Arms*' real depth lies.

The main means of attack in *Arms* is to curve your fists in towards your opponent, using tricky bends to catch them dodging, or to set up a big punch with your other hand. The combat system is simple – there are no special moves. It's all about movement and mind games, like tricking an opponent into committing to attacking you as you dodge around their arm to deliver a big one-two punch, or forcing them to block long enough for you to catch them with a highly damaging grab.

Arms is not without a few minor irritations, though. Unlocking more fists for your characters is done through a pretty tedious minigame that has you punching targets to make loot boxes drop. The contents of the boxes is random, so there's no way to specifically unlock stuff for your favourite character. This is extra-frustrating when you meet a player online who has more options in combat than you because they've been luckier with this minigame. The other minigames aren't even that good and lose their lustre after a game or two. Also, the motion controls, like all motion controls, don't quite cut it at the higher levels of play. You can get by with standard pad controls, however, and things like blocking and rapid movement are way easier.

When you're sat next to someone, playing *Arms* in local multiplayer mode (or Ranked, once you finally get it unlocked), is absolutely brilliant. It's as likely to get you screaming at your pals as Mario Kart, but it also possesses the depth and strategic options you associate with the best fighting games.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

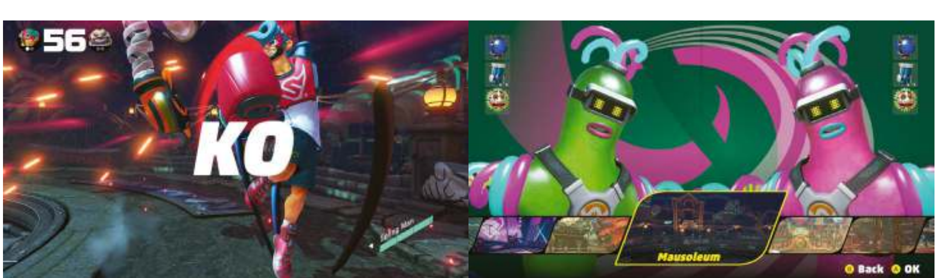
STREAMLINED COMBAT: *Arms* boils down the systems in fighting games to simple hits, throws and the ability to block and dodge. This means there's no combo memorisation – instead you rely on your own trickery, reads and reactions.



Above: Co-op is available in almost every mode, but playing *Arms* when you're tied to another player results in utter chaos. The game is clearly geared towards one-on-one combat.







Above: The game's 'Ryu', Spring Man, scores a satisfying throw KO. His fists power up when he's near defeat, making him a considerable threat when you've got him against the ropes. He's also a good all-rounder, making him a great choice for new players.



ANOTHER ESSENTIAL MULTIPLAYER GAME FOR SWITCH

FOR-REAL DRIVE

Dirt 4





Above: Rallycross feels like a whole new sport compared to a straight rally, but even with the added danger of opponents all around you the same key driving skills will see you to victory.

Forget the plethora of cars, the variety in the environmental design and multiple racing disciplines, *Dirt 4*'s real success comes in the form of meaningful personalisation. We're not talking about shallow options regarding what your vehicles look like or what name you want to give your racing team, we're talking about genuinely worthwhile choices when it comes to defining how and what you want to play.

Chief among these game changers is the handling. You must decide whether you want the more forgiving, more accessible 'Gamer' handling model, or the decidedly more taxing and, ultimately, stimulating 'Simulation' designation. The fact that both these choices work to create a racer that feels consequential and aspirational is no mean feat, with each working to promote the core tenets of calculated risk, unpredictability and self-improvement that define a rally racer.

Take up the reins in 'Gamer' mode and you'll find yourself driven to improve to the point where you're capable of switching to 'Simulation', and enjoying the access to the more competitive online scene that provides. There might be two tiers of play, but the lower tier prepares you for the upper.

No matter what you choose you're exposed to a rally game that is at once dedicated to its sport and not so pretentious about its provision that it appeals only to those who know the difference between an exhaust manifold and Kris Meeke. At the upper end of the difficultly scale you do need to push yourself into using, at the least, manual transmission and performing warm up runs to make sure your hand-eye co-ordination is on point, but the gentle way it nudges you to this is both welcoming and demonstrative of quality design.

These realities ring true throughout all four of *Dirt 4*'s primary racing disciplines: rally, Land Rush, classic rally and Rallycross. Classic rally sees nostalgia punch you in the gut with the chance to drive classic cars from the Eighties and Nineties, while Land Rush and Rallycross are decidedly more modern affairs. Both the latter feature short laps, multiple cars and a lot of aggressive jostling for position. As such, they require a very different skillset than that of the usual point-to-point solo rallies and that brings a much-needed change of pace. Just when the concentration required to master a more traditional stage in the rugged, wet Welsh hills becomes too much, you can jump online for a smash-'em-up race against friends.

The variety keeps you in the game and that, in time, enables you to master the feel and potential of the cars on offer. Best of all, improving is enjoyable – you never feel as though you're playing simply to get better. You can't ask for more from a racer than that.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DIVERSITY: This is not just a rally game or a dirt racing game, it's a fully-fleshed out off-road experience with plenty to do and learn. What's more, nothing included here feels like a gimmick.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
DIRT RALLY





WORSE THAN
PROJECT CARS

VERDICT 9/10
THE BEST RALLY GAME OF THIS CONSOLE GENERATION

Below: Racing through the dark at night comes with added danger and difficulty, not least that any tap of a tree or bank with your bonnet is likely to kill your headlights. Racing without any vision whatsoever is not recommended.







Cat Quest

Coming soon to PS4 and Switch













"This Night Clubber boss may have drank something dodgy on their night out..."

GIVE IT A GOO

Dragon Quest Heroes II

Dragon Quest Heroes II offers you much more than a simple _Dynasty Warriors_-style experience. RPG and action elements are blended to varying degrees of success, while its charming looks make this take on the classic hack-and-slash game feel fresh.

You start by choosing to play as one of two protagonists, with the leftover one serving in the story as your cousin. The game quickly establishes these two characters as very different personalities (though they both play the same), and they bounce off of each other well in the gorgeous cinematic cutscenes. The story mode moves at a decent clip, with new characters and plot twists to keep you hooked between the missions.

As the story progresses you'll pick up additional party members – warrior Desdemona, wandering peddler Torneko, and more – who have a variety of abilities. Assembling a party that suits your playstyle is the key to victory. Your character starts as a Warrior but you'll switch Vocation (to, say, a Mage or Priest), which will change up what kind of skills you'll be able to use in battle. Each Vocation has its own weapons and special skills that significantly change the way you mop up enemies out on the battlefield.

Just like in the *Dynasty Warriors* series, most of *Dragon Quest Heroes II*'s action takes place on huge battlefields, where you'll have to take out hordes of enemies by comboing together huge strings of attacks – backed up by your party, of course. This game distinguishes itself from the usual 'mashy' combat by having Magic, a Tension meter which lets you to unleash a super-move named Coup De Grace when full, and its RPG mechanics, allowing you to mould your character and party members to your choosing. However, you'll find yourself quickly getting tired of *Dragon Quest Heroes II*'s main battles, and there's not much else to offer.

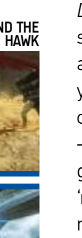
Aside from the main action, there are hackneyed side missions – just how many times are we going to have to do escort duty? You'll find heaps of loot, and you're free to use almost anything at your disposal. Finding a Vocation that suits your playstyle is key to having a good time, but you'll often find yourself fighting the camera, with its poor, floaty movement, which also extends to its lock-on functions for larger enemies.

Dragon Quest Heroes II plays on nostalgia, dressed up as it is in all the charming bells and whistles of a *Dragon Quest* game, but it lacks true depth in its mission variety, and since that's what you'll be doing for most of the game, it's a little bit disappointing. While the charming characters, stellar voice acting and cutscenes are all great, it's just not enough.




DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PS Vita, Switch
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Omega Force
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: No



BERSERK AND THE BAND OF THE HAWK





HYRULE WARRIORS

CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

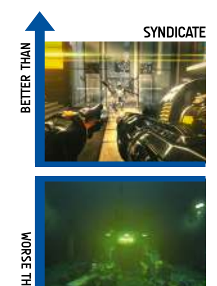
SPARRING BUDDY: You can play in co-op, but multiplayer has been restricted to specific, set parts of the game, which can be disappointing for those wanting to play with friends.


VERDICT 6/10

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD THIN

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PC
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Bandai Namco
DEVELOPER: The Farm 51
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



DON'T GET CROSS...

Get Even

Compared to other first-person shooters, *Get Even*'s body count is very low. Next to horror staples like *Amnesia* or *PT*, its scares are sporadic. But throughout there is a terrific sense that something is wrong, helped by a brilliant score by composer Olivier Derivière.

As contract killer Cole Black, you wake up after a mission gone wrong and are charged, by a mysterious benefactor, with retracing memories from your previous assignments – it's implied you will unlock some awful, significant truth. There are shooting sections, puzzles and a hint of playing detective, as you use a gadget-packed smartphone to gather evidence. But while the parts are familiar, the experience of *Get Even* is not. If critical favourites like *Spec Ops: The Line* and *Far Cry 3* insist violence is sinister, *Get Even* creates a much more brooding atmosphere with just a few lines of dialogue and some well-placed sound effects. From Black's laboured breathing to the malevolent hum of machinery, *Get Even*'s audio resonates almost subliminally. Combined with your often-abstract actions and objectives (using a prototype gun that shoots around corners, you murder security guards, as they discuss their friend's birthday party) it evokes an unprecedented sense of unease.

The script is occasionally off-key and Black's voiceover produces more laughs than dramatic weight. The smartphone is a tricky addition that, more often than not, gets in the way of *Get Even*'s best qualities. Detours through an asylum, even when vaguely hallucinatory, are predictable, and the game focuses too much on object collection. It is, of course, a mystery and psychological drama, but the flood of written lore overwhelms *Get Even*'s visual and aural metaphors.

Nevertheless, it's a compelling game, notable for not slipping easily into any genre. Usually, when you're told "in order to understand this game you have to play it yourself," it isn't true – video clips may explain things. In this case, you need to get your hands on – and dirty.


VERDICT 7/10
AN UNUSUAL, OCCASIONALLY POWERFUL, MUST-PLAY GAME



Above: Your smartphone is an all-purpose gadget which can be used to warp objects in and out of your surroundings. Not unlike *Condemned* from 2006, various puzzles are solved using its thermal detection feature and UV light.

"WHAT'S IN THE BOX?"

GNOG

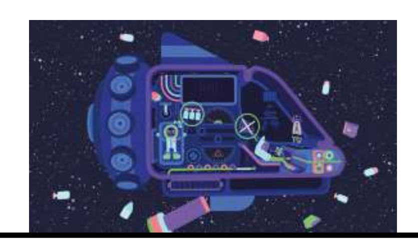
VR is becoming something of a playground for indie developers. The new tech is the perfect platform for testing new ideas as so many people are eager to experience innovative ways of playing games. While KO_OP's new game works perfectly outside the medium of VR (it's shortly heading to iOS), it gains much from being played within a virtual world.

The beauty of *GNOG* is in exploration, as you're given very little information once the game has loaded. You're presented with a small selection of toys, often in the shapes of giant heads, and must work out how to unlock and solve their secrets. Using a small cursor you discover that you can pull, prod and manipulate specific parts of each toy, gradually finding out how each part works and contributes to the whole. You can also flip each toy through 180 degrees (which looks particularly cool in VR) ensuring that you don't miss any critical elements of the overall puzzle.

Initially you'll fumble around trying all sorts of things, often in desperation, but it soon falls organically into place, delivering a sense of satisfaction that's up there with the best examples of the genre. As you tentatively feel your way around each level, small, self-contained stories play out – these range from a pair of astronauts attempting to fix their shuttle so they can travel home, to a mother bird who must hatch and then feed her growing brood. The stories are delightfully constructed and complemented by a truly sublime soundtrack, which builds to a glorious swell once a stage has finally been completed.

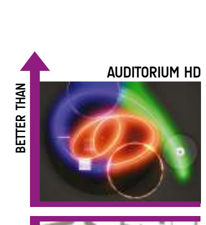
GNOG isn't the deepest of games – in fact, it's arguably one of the lightest VR experiences we've encountered – but that doesn't mean it's not worth your time. It's a gorgeously constructed fusion of puzzling and subtle storytelling with a final stage that hints at the complexity KO_OP might achieve if it ever gets around to making a sequel.

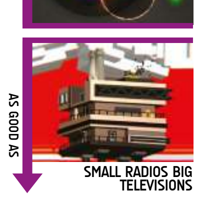
VERDICT 7/10
A SHORT-LIVED AESTHETIC TREAT



DETAILS

FORMAT: PSVR
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PS4
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Double Fine Productions
DEVELOPER: KO_OP Mode
PRICE: £11.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A







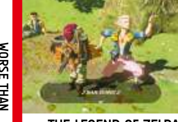
DETAILS

FORMAT: Switch
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Mojang
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £19.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4 (local multiplayer)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

AS GOOD AS

DRAGON QUEST BUILDERS





THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD

WORSE THAN

BACK TO THE OL' COALFACE

Minecraft

You should know the drill by now; it's *Minecraft*. If you don't recognise the name, you might want to take a step outside of the primitive cave you're obviously living in, because this building title is the 21st Century's gaming phenomenon. Of all its versions, the PC iteration of *Minecraft* will always be the definitive version, but the Switch edition is, by a country mile, the best option on console.





Above: As this is a *Minecraft* release on a Nintendo console, a degree of Nintendo flair has been added to it. This comes in the form of a bright and colourful Mario texture pack that includes classic tunes from the franchise. Get building those pipes!

That's not because it does anything particularly new. *Minecraft* just suits Switch's adaptable nature really well. It plays much like the Vita version, where you can use the touchscreen for finer menu navigation, but with the added benefit of it being easy to switch between mobile and home console modes. It's that simple, really, and all the more effective for it. Splitscreen multiplayer does, understandably, require an extra controller – a single Joy-Con does not have the functionality or required number of buttons to play *Minecraft*.

While being able to switch between portable and big-screen of *Minecraft* is a boon, we did encounter a handful of minor frustrations: the control mapping could be better – by default, throwing an item is mapped to B, the button universally known as 'the jump button', and sprinting requires you to double-tap the analogue stick while moving forward, which can be difficult to pull off when a Creeper catches you unaware. The menu interface could also be more forgiving to use, and with the option of using a touchscreen it would be nice to use the classic PC method of crafting. We also noticed a few frame-rate dips, especially when entering a new biome or braving the Nether.

That all said, it's still *Minecraft*: a game that is a pleasure to play no matter if you're playing it on iOS, Xbox One or Switch. The game has a universal appeal, and its status as a modern classic is uncontested. This is just another block in its pedestal.


VERDICT 8/10

ANOTHER FINE PORT OF MOJANG'S MONOLITH

SIDE-STEP THIS ONE

Strafe

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, Mac
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Devolver Digital
DEVELOPER: Pixel Titans
PRICE: £14.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

On paper, *Strafe* sounds pretty promising: a *Quake*-like roguelike with a pulsing soundtrack and tongue-in-cheek presentation, where even the game's website is the pinnacle of Nineties web design. *Strafe* isn't any of the above, though. *Strafe* is like a watered-down version of what it pitches – it wants to be the *Starship Troopers* of retro sci-fi shooters, but it's really 1998's *Lost In Space*.

It goes with the territory of roguelikes to start you off with a weak weapon. However *Strafe*'s unholy trio of starting weapons – shotgun, railgun and submachine gun – are so anaemic that you wonder if there's any point in using them at all. Things do get better if you come across an upgrade station and bestow your weapon with a random upgrade but you're unlikely to even make it there with a reasonable amount of health left, let alone get something useful bolted onto your primary tool of mob clearance. The weapons you find on your way – plasma rifles, disc launchers, rocket launchers et al– are much more interesting, and it'd be much better to be able to purchase them as a one-off before you begin each run with currency gathered from playing the game.

BETTER THAN

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER



DOOM

WORSE THAN



A lot of the enemy designs are uninspired, mindless fodder that follow you around and are only difficult to deal with because of their sheer numbers. It gets better the deeper into *Strafe* you get, but actually getting yourself to that point is a chore.

Randomised map design is also a pretty standard approach to a roguelike nowadays. It just doesn't translate to this 3D shooter particularly well. In their heyday, *Quake* and *Doom* were lauded for their meticulously-crafted levels and enemy placement – and they were all constructed by humans. *Strafe*'s level-building algorithm creates labyrinthine messes with masses and masses of enemies that are so generic they might as well be called 'Enemy 1', Enemy 2' and so on. And don't even think about crying to the map for help. It'll just leave you scratching your space helmet more.

It's a shame, really. A first-person roguelike with meaty weapons that calls back to the glory of Nineties shooters sounds like such a tantalising proposition, one that we feel could do so well. *Strafe* just offers that in a very shallow way.


VERDICT 5/10

THE NEW DEFINITION OF 'CORRIDOR SHOOTER'

BOLDLY GOING WHERE NO VR GAME HAS GONE BEFORE

Star Trek: Bridge Crew



Ubisoft is one of the leading developers for PSVR. *Eagle Flight* remains one of the most freeing experiences you can have on Sony's fledgling format, while the greatly underappreciated *Werewolves Within* highlighted just how well party games could work in VR. Ubisoft's now allowing adults of a certain age to relive their playground dreams of commanding a Federation starship and it could well be the most exciting advance for PSVR yet.

In many ways, *Bridge Crew* is essentially a souped-up version of Job Simulator, albeit one that rewards co-operative play. It's perfectly possible to play on your own, but it's nowhere near as thrilling an experience. Four classes are available: the Helm officer is in charge of steering the ship; the Tactical officer takes care of weaponry and sensors; and the Engineer manages the ship's power distribution and takes care of repairs. The Captain is the final part of the puzzle and the most important as they must pass on the objectives they receive to the rest of the crew, ensuring the mission is completed as efficiently as possible.

Solo play puts you in command as the Captain and allows you to instruct the rest of the crew by simply looking at them, which works exceptionally well. You can seamlessly jump into the other members of the team if you want more direct control, but this can get a little tricky in later missions when multiple objectives need to be achieved.

While *Bridge Crew* can be played using a standard controller, it really benefits from motion controls, particularly when you're playing with others and can wildly gesticulate to emphasise just how important it is that your crew follow their orders. While we did experience a few tracking issues, it was nothing a little calibration couldn't sort out. Once the comprehensive tutorial is out of the way you're given the option to jump into an online match, play with friends, work through the five main missions (which culminate with the epic Kobayashi Maru Challenge) or play procedurally-generated missions in Ongoing Voyages.

Online play is *Bridge Crew*'s trump card and it's simply sensational to experience. Designed for cross-format play and featuring crystal-clear speech, it's the best title we've experienced to date for gaming with other players in a virtual space. The online community is really friendly and of course it helps that every group we've played with has role-played their parts to perfection, but it's tremendously exciting to experience even if you can't tell your Vulcans from your Romulans. You really do feel that you're there on the bridge, working, panicking and celebrating with your teammates. It's an important glimpse into the future of online play for VR. Some might balk at the fact the main campaign can be completed in around five hours, but it feels a trifling thing to complain about when the varied generated missions offer so much replay value. And some of us don't even like *Star Trek*!

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSVR
OTHER FORMATS: Rift, Vive
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Red Storm Entertainment
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
JOB SIMULATOR





WORSE THAN
ELITE DANGEROUS

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

MORE MISSIONS: While the Ongoing Voyages are surprisingly varied, it's a real shame that Red Storm Entertainment couldn't have added more story missions. It'd also be great if they'd given players the chance to pilot additional ships.

VERDICT 8/10
BEAM UP FOR AN IMMERSIVE MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE





Above: The core missions take place in the alternate reality established in JJ Abrams' new *Star Trek* universe and have you piloting the USS Aegis. The procedurally-generated missions also add the USS Enterprise, although its older tech makes it far harder to play.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: PQube
DEVELOPER: Arc System Works
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

AS GOOD AS: BLAZBLUE CENTRAL FICTION

WORSE THAN: ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV

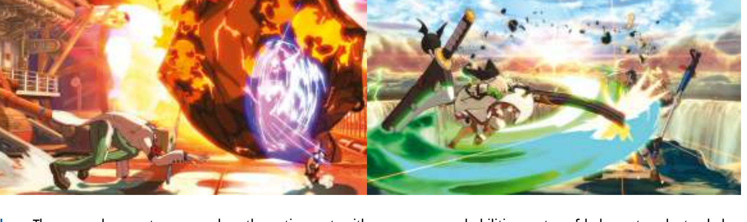
FOR THOSE ABOUT TO RUCK, WE SALUTE YOU

Guilty Gear Xrd Rev 2

It was something of a running joke back when *Street Fighter II* would just get new words added to its title for constant re-releases, but the iterative update model is still going strong well over two decades later. When handled well, as with the likes of *Street Fighter IV*'s expansions and this latest effort from Arc System Works, it's arguably the best of both worlds – an affordable entry point for newcomers that compiles everything players could want or need, and a cut-price upgrade option for those who already own the earlier version (in this case, *Revelator*).

It's fair to call this a relatively minor update to the excellent anime fighter. There are two new characters (Baiken and Answer), a few new stages, an expanded story and it even shares the base game's Trophy list – but that's purely testament to how little refinement *Guilty Gear Xrd* actually needs at this point. The game's core systems are superbly empowering, if somewhat daunting at first, though that's offset by a comprehensive training mode that covers everything from basic movement and simple attacks to high-level combos and even matchup-specific lessons and advice. And if even that sounds like too much work, the optional simplified control scheme with basic specials and auto-combos will let you nuke the screen with colours just like the pros do. Well, sort of, but you get the point.

With the depth and complexity to back up its cel-shaded good looks, a host of entertaining modes for both solo and competitive play and a cast of unique characters that offers a fighter for every style of play (and then some – Jack-O's moveset is almost more real-time strategy than fighting game), *Xrd Rev 2* is the result of Arc System Works honing its craft to near perfection to create what may very well be the defining 2D fighter of this generation so far.



Above: There are changes to more or less the entire cast, with new moves and abilities on top of balance tweaks to shake things up as the two new fighters (four if you count *Revelator*'s DLC characters, included here) join the fray.

VERDICT 9/10
A ROCK-SOLID SUCCESS ON ALL FRONTS

GUILE'S THEME NO LONGER GOES WITH EVERYTHING

Ultra Street Fighter II: The Final Challengers

Here's a crazy fact: it's been 23 years since *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* hit arcades and there *still* hasn't been an arcade-perfect port of the game. Home conversions at the time were held back by hardware limitations, but versions that have come since have suffered everything from input lag to annoying loading times, from bizarre glitches to changes to the core mechanics. That this latest update fails to deliver the CPS2 Holy Grail would be an unfair criticism, but it's just one of many points that show *Ultra* for what it is – a nostalgia-powered cash-grab rather than a celebration of one of the most important fighting games ever made.

The list of issues is not a short one. For starters, the game uses neither the original's mechanics nor those rebalanced for *HD Remix*, instead delivering a strange hybrid of the two. Even the in-game move list can't keep up with what bits come from where, listing Akuma's teleport as a three-button input when it uses *HD Remix*'s simplified two-button shortcut. New changes are curious, with throw techs added and stocking supers altered, a combined insta-nerf to around a third of the cast at high-level play. Turbo options are gone. New characters are as broken as Akuma was. Music has been redone and still isn't as good as the original OST, though you can switch back to that. The same is true of Udon's redrawn graphics, which barely hold up to being blown up in docked mode – stick to the sprites. The bonus modes are awful. Buddy Battle is a daft 2v1 distraction, and motion control dumpster fire Way Of The Hado would still be horrible if the controls worked as intended. Controls in general can be an issue. The convenience of multiplayer anywhere with a Joy-Con each is great, but the precision just isn't there for decent matches.

Which leaves you with Arcade mode, functional-at-best online and training suites and a digital art book – hardly a great deal given the RRP. While *SFII* itself is obviously still brilliant, there's nothing about this bare-bones package that even *nearly* does Capcom's classic justice.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Switch
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £34.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes





Above: Udon's comic sprites are divisive, although a few fans will tell you they prefer the redrawn characters over the pixelated originals. The same is unlikely to be true of the music, though – the remixes here are mostly weak.



"QUICK, CHANGE THE CHANNEL!"

TILT SHIFT ASSASSIN

Tokyo 42

If only *Tokyo 42* had a slightly sharper edge to it, a little more precision in its thrust, a little more polish in its translation, it would be one of the great action games of the year. As it stands, it's an impressive and challenging experience that's well worth taking some time with, but it has just a few too many frustrations to be in any way essential.

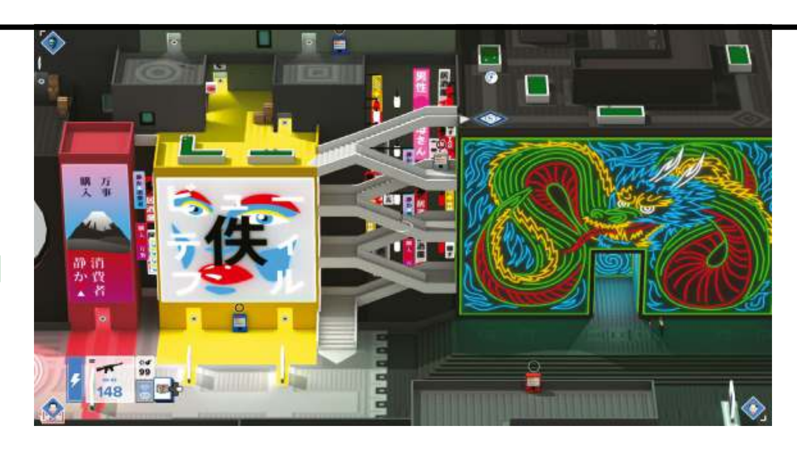
The most important of these issues is some imprecision in certain controls. Some of these issues are likely born from *Tokyo 42* being a PC release first and foremost, but while the adaptation of the experience to a gamepad has led to some quirks, we do think the way mouse and keyboard movement has been translated into analogue sticks works pretty well. Having said that, the way the bikes handle, for instance, shows a developer hitting issues with how to offer movement control in a challenging isometric environment with real physics driving the experience. We honestly became so frustrated with missions involving the bike that we pretty much gave up attempting to complete them unless we absolutely had to.



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PS4
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Mode 7
DEVELOPER: SMAC Games
PRICE: £15.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes





Despite that, the breadth and nature of the missions on offer in *Tokyo 42* is refreshingly good. We were actually a little taken aback by the scope of the world map once we realised just how big it is, and the number of sources for assassin contracts or for side quests is good. They more or less all boil down to 'go to this place and kill everyone there/someone in particular', but environmental factors or any stipulations about the hit you're pulling off can create some fun new circumstances and stop the missions feeling too similar. For instance, climbing to the top of a structure and sniping a moving target, watching the bullet glide through the air before hitting its mark doesn't really lose its appeal.

And it helps that this is such a detailed and rich world to explore. The vaguely dystopian feel of the game, somewhere between *Blade Runner* and an Apple Store, is packed with nods to classic movies and Japanese culture. The architecture is often strange and angular, but also very enticing. It manages to fulfil one of the great needs of any sandbox game experience: inviting you as a player to explore it further. And it's an impressively big map given how much work has gone into developing these assets. Every district of this city has a unique feel, so even though you're constantly rotating the camera (and with it the map) to suit your needs, you'll always have a sense of which direction any particular region is in.

The odd difficulty spike, the fact that in-game text might feel a little too small on TV screens depending on what you're playing on and some overpowered weapons in places make *Tokyo 42* a frustrating game more often than we would like (and, of course, those bikes…), but we kept coming back for more, which we think says a lot about its lasting appeal.

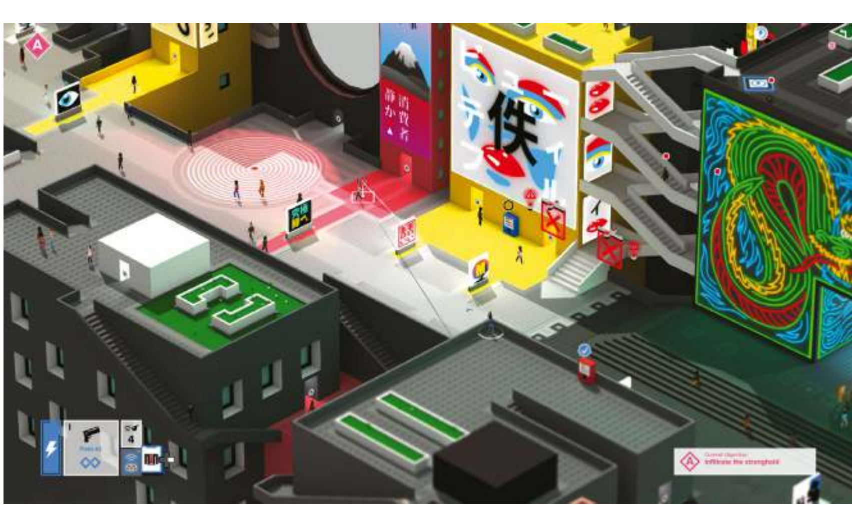
WORLDWIDE

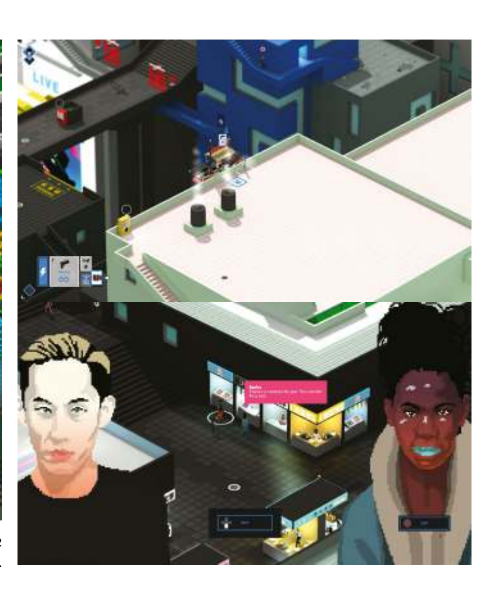
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

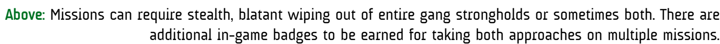
MASS MAYHEM: The multiplayer deathmatch option of the game is a little like *Assassin's Creed* as you must hunt for another assassin in a mass of people. Finding a game proved a challenge, but it's a fun distraction if you can get one going.

VERDICT 7/10

BRIGHT IN STYLE AND EXECUTION, BUT IMPERFECT







Above: Missions can require stealth, blatant wiping out of entire gang strongholds or sometimes both. There are additional in-game badges to be earned for taking both approaches on multiple missions.

WHY I ❤...

THE LAST EXPRESS

STEVE GAYNOR, CO-FOUNDER, FULLBRIGHT

“*As far as a game that I love, it would be* The Last Express, *by Jordan Mechner. It came out in the late days of Nineties adventure games, kind of around the same time as* Grim Fandango. *The whole game is effectively one ongoing timeline where you're on a train, you're on the Orient Express in 1914 and, basically, if you just stand still, events will carry on around you. But you can't stand still forever because you're a stowaway on the train, you'll get caught.*

So, you have to do the adventure game puzzle things and solve the different mysteries that are happening to not get thrown off the train. But you also have the ability to move backwards through time from where you are standing, so when you're in any given place on the train you can be seeing things from one perspective, as the real-time clock is still moving on in the background. It means that these people are having conversations in the dining car, and this person is talking with somebody in their cabin, and the conductor is walking down the hall and asking for the tickets and it's all happening. You can experience all of those things one at a time; you can go to the dining car and overhear that conversation and rewind time so you're back in your cabin and then climb out of the window and come out around behind where the conductor is coming to hear this other exchange between people.

It makes you think, 'I'm one person within this large web of events that's surrounding me and I have the ability to move myself through them and build a complete picture of what's going on here'. I think it's a super interesting creation. There's never been another game like it, and it's all done through really interesting rotoscoping, so it has a kind of strange, unique, visual look as well. So, if people are interested in Tacoma and looking for something that is kind of a precursor in a lot of interesting ways they should check out The Last Express.”





"I think it's a super interesting creation, there's never been another game like it"

STEVE GAYNOR, CO-FOUNDER, FULLBRIGHT

RETRO



THE RETRO GUIDE TO… SEGA MEGA-CD

It didn't have the most expansive library, but there are still plenty of interesting games to discover on Sega's Mega Drive add-on



EVERY DEVELOPER WAS eager to embrace CD-ROM technology in the early Nineties, and Sega was no different. Released three years after NEC's PC Engine add-on, it proved to be something of a misstep for Sega and is seen by some as one of the early bricks in the road to Sega's later ruin.

The biggest issue with the add-on was that it simply didn't have enough key exclusives, while many of its earlier games, such as *Earnest Evans* and *Sol-Feace*, eventually ended up on a standard Mega Drive anyway. Luckily, *Final Fight CD* proved that the system was more than capable of creating terrific arcade ports, while Core Design was one of several developers that really tried to push the system's power. There are a number of interesting exclusives on the platform, and it's now seen as something of a collector's system, particularly if you're a lover of cheesy FMV games.





SOL-FEACE 1991

WOLF TEAM

Wolf Team was both proficient and prolific when it came to Mega-CD games. This launch title is actually a port from the Sharp X68000 version, which had been launched the previous year. It's a solid, if rather unexciting shooter that is notable for a large number of clever graphic effects that really highlight how proficient Wolf Team was with the new hardware. There are some gigantic bosses to face as you battle through the numerous stages and it's accompanied by a rather punchy soundtrack. It's all rather uninspired, though, while the large size of your ship can make it tricky to avoid enemies. An impressive Mega Drive port appeared in 1992.

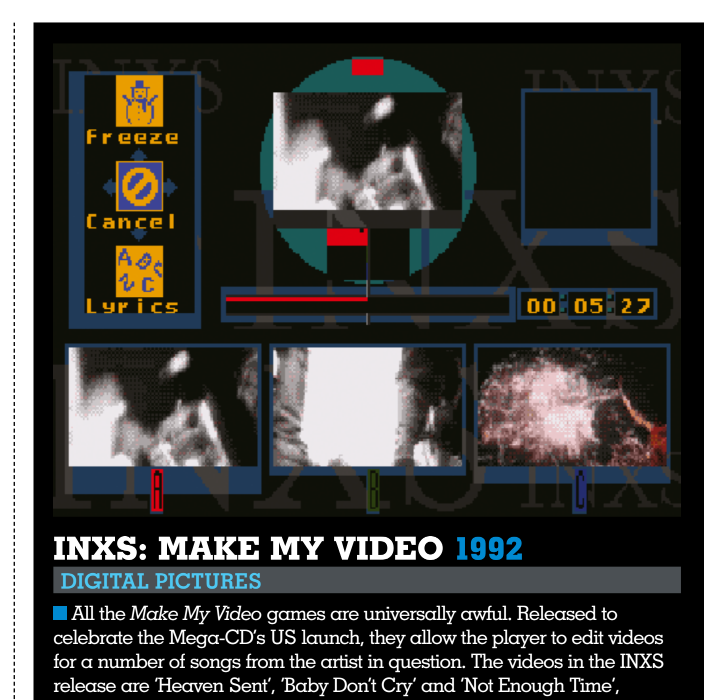




NIGHT TRAP 1992

DIGITAL PICTURES

This early FMV release has the player attempting to stop guests from being attacked by the vampire-like Augers by using traps to immobilise them. Playing as a member of the Sega Control Attack Team (S.C.A.T.), you're able to switch between the eight different cameras found in the Martin household in order to solve the mystery of the five teenage girls that had previously gone missing there. You can only trigger traps if you have the correct access code so you need to eavesdrop on conversations in order to work out what they are. While it's probably one of the better examples of the genre on the system, it was overshadowed by a hearing on violent videogames in December 1993, which led to the forming of the Entertainment Software Ratings Board.

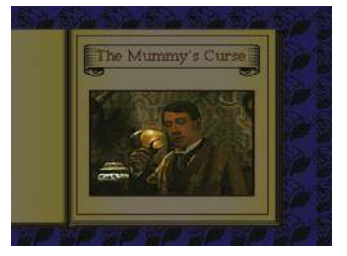


INXS: MAKE MY VIDEO 1992

DIGITAL PICTURES

All the *Make My Video* games are universally awful. Released to celebrate the Mega-CD's US launch, they allow the player to edit videos for a number of songs from the artist in question. The videos in the INXS release are 'Heaven Sent', 'Baby Don't Cry' and 'Not Enough Time', from the album, *Welcome To Wherever You Are*.



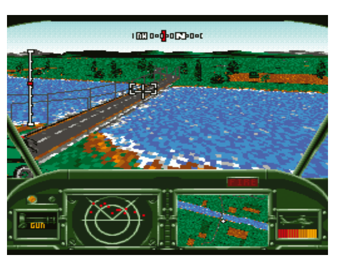


SHERLOCK HOLMES: CONSULTING DETECTIVE VOL. 1 1992

ICOM SIMULATIONS

This intriguing FMV game is based on the board game of the same name and has you solving three difficult cases with the help of Dr Watson. The icon-driven gameplay allows you to do everything from search newspapers for clues, to travelling to key areas to interview different people. Surprisingly well acted, it received a sequel the same year.





THUNDERHAWK 1992

CORE DESIGN

This was one of the earliest reasons to own a Mega-CD. While the visuals haven't aged gracefully, they were astonishing for the time and proved impossible on a standard Mega Drive. Playing as a fictional AH-73M attack helicopter, you battle your way through a number of exciting missions blasting everything to kingdom come. Immensely popular on Sega's add-on, it was succeeded by two sequels.

JURASSIC PARK 1993

SEGA MULTIMEDIA STUDIO

Sega spared no expense creating *Jurassic Park* and even sent its team to Hawaii to record hours of footage for the project. The end result is a surprisingly slick point-and-click adventure that sees the player having to collect eggs from seven different dinosaurs and placing them in an incubator within a 12-hour real-time limit. You have a variety of weapons to defend yourself against dinosaurs, while paleontologist Robert T. Bakker pops up from time to time to offer useful information.







BATMAN RETURNS 1993

MALIBU INTERACTIVE

One of the biggest annoyances of a Mega-CD owner was being fobbed off with a naff upgrade over the original Mega Drive release. Many developers felt it was perfectly okay to simply take the original game and stick an FMV intro at the beginning and add a new Redbook soundtrack.

While Malibu Interactive's Mega-CD port does both these things, it also adds some truly sensational racing sections that are exclusive to the console. Depending on the level, you can play as either the Batmobile or the Batboat and they still manage to look sensational today, hurling sprites around the screen and presenting a real challenge. It's a pity then that the platform sections, also found in the Mega Drive version, are nowhere near as good.





KEIO FLYING SQUADRON 1993

VICTOR ENTERTAINMENT

This utterly bizarre shooter is the closest the Mega-CD comes to a *Parodius*-styled blaster. Playing a dragon-riding bunny girl, you mow down waves of enemy racoons that attack you with increasingly outlandish weapons and bosses. There's a variety of solid power-ups to collect and it's possible to change the area of your hitbox. This last point is particularly important because, even on its easiest setting, *Keio* can be a punishingly tough game. Stick with it though, as it's one of the system's most rewarding blasters.



DOUBLE SWITCH 1993

DIGITAL PICTURES

Digital Pictures put out a huge amount of content for the Mega-CD, but it missed more often than it hit. *Double Switch* was effectively an improved variation of *Night Trap*, and features a similar trap-'em-up theme. Spread across three distinct acts, it's a little more involved than *Night Trap* and features an infuriating boss on the final stage, which must be continually trapped in order to stop it from defeating residents. It's most famous for featuring Eighties child actor Corey Haim (*The Lost Boys*).





JAGUAR XJ220 1993

CORE DESIGN

Racing fans were underserved on the Mega-CD so it's lucky Core Design came to the rescue with an officially licensed Jaguar game. This blisteringly fast racer features neat weather effects, includes a world tour that lets you compete in 16 different countries, and also includes a Grand Prix mode that takes you through a string of progressively tougher races. Best of all is the surprisingly comprehensive track editor, which ensures you've plenty to keep you busy once you're done with the main game.





LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR 1993

GAME ARTS, STUDIO ALEX

The Mega-CD is poorly served when it comes to RPGs, but it did get two excellent *Lunar* games. Blessed with a stunning localisation by Working Designs, *Lunar* features some commendable voice acting and a highly engaging plot (even if it's not that original). The turn-based combat doesn't offer anything out of the ordinary, but it's well-balanced and features some extremely challenging bosses. Annoyingly, it was never released in the UK, although a third remake, *Lunar: Silver Star Harmony* was released on PSP in 2010.

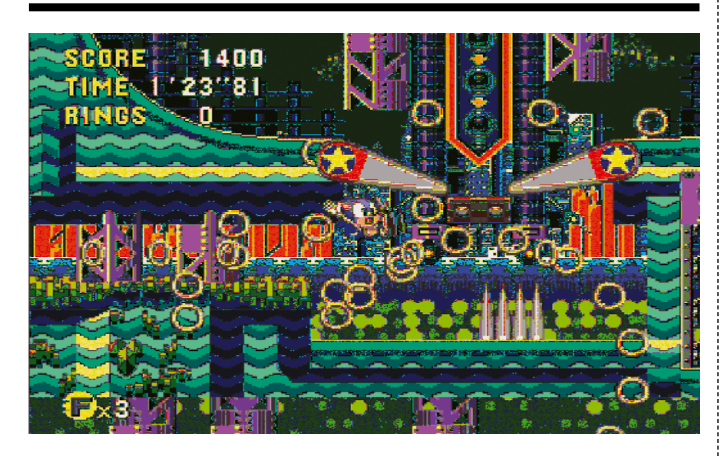


FINAL FIGHT CD 1993

SEGA

Final Fight was a huge coup for the SNES in its early days, causing Sega to hit back with its *Streets Of Rage* series. It would eventually port its own version of the hit Capcom game to the Mega-CD, arguably improving on the earlier Super Nintendo conversion in every possible way. The Mega-CD version not only features an enhanced soundtrack, but also adds the all-important two-player mode. It features every single stage from the game and even finds time to include an all-inclusive time attack mode, extending the admittedly limited gameplay. Sadly, it's still not as frantic as the arcade original due to there being fewer enemies to battle.





SONIC THE HEDGEHOG CD 1993

SONIC TEAM

Originally planned as an enhanced port of *Sonic 2*, this impressive game eventually turned into a Mega-CD exclusive. Considered by many to be one of the best games in the series, it's notable for its neat time-travel mechanics that allow Sonic to travel between the past and future by hitting the relevant signposts and moving at a set speed for a certain amount of time. It also introduces the Super Peel Out, which is a quicker version of *Sonic 2*'s Spin Dash. Filled with imaginative bosses, some excellent level design and an all new bonus stage (that wouldn't have been possible on a standard Mega Drive), it's an essential game from a flagship developer.



ROB FULOP TALKS NIGHT TRAP

The talented coder discusses his controversial FMV game



How long did *Night Trap* take to create?

It was shot in 16 days in 1987 and took another few months to edit. The software was developed concurrently. All told, it took about six months to get working.

Were there any problems?

With a traditional game, the author can fiddle to their heart's content with all the on-screen elements, often right up until the game is completed. With a 'moviegame' like *Night Trap*, the author has practically no 'tweaking' ability as all the assets are handed over as a video stream; there is no way to go back and insert a new scene or change the timing of when an actor comes in. The game must be designed as a script and the first time the game is played is much later; at that point it's too late to make significant changes.

Did the actors have any issues?

The actors knew it was an interactive game, but their day-to-day process was identical to making a movie or TV show. They came on set, rehearsed their lines, and performed as directed. There were a few times they needed to work out careful timing of when they entered and left the scene, but that was coordinated by other people. Interactive 'moviegames' were populated by performers on their way up or down the Hollywood ladder; nobody aspired to appear in a 'moviegame!'"

What was it like working with Dana Plato?

Dana was fine to work with at first, very professional. She needed the work. Later she became more problematic; she'd come late and never wanted to rehearse. Her doing this project was obviously a step down from her previous popularity and she didn't make a great deal of effort to hide this fact.

Tell us about the censorship issues.

It was annoying to hear *Night Trap* compared to *Mortal Kombat* – a game featuring one character ripping the heart out of their opponent's chest. The most graphic scene in *Night Trap* involved two thugs dragging their victim off camera. The whole witch-hunt was ridiculous and totally without merit. I was very embarrassed that something I had made was being torn apart like that. Many people were getting the complete wrong idea.

Did anything good come out of it?

It led directly to the establishment of a rating system for games. I think it made sense. Potentially disturbing games should be labelled as such. A lot of grandparents buy these games for kids, and don't really have a clue what they are buying.

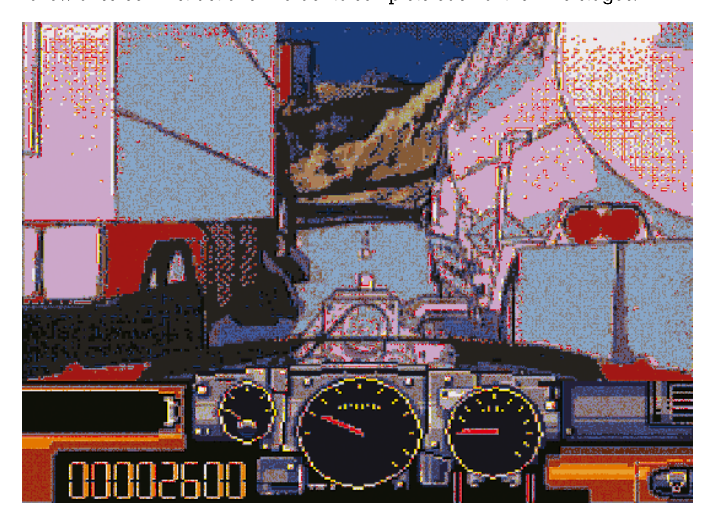
Did it deserve the negative reception?

Comparing *Night Trap* to a traditional videogame is like comparing *American Idol* to *Star Wars*. They are two totally different experiences offered on different platforms to different audiences. The intent of the 'moviegame' genre was to go after the 95 per cent of the people in the world who don't play traditional videogames. So throwing rocks at such a thing and claiming that the gameplay doesn't hold up compared to *Doom* is silly. That said, we hardly created a breakthrough form of interactive entertainment. We took a shot, it didn't go very far, end of story. But we never for one second thought we were making something that should be compared to a real videogame. A game reviewer complaining that *Night Trap* isn't a fun enough game is like a film critic complaining that a game show doesn't have enough action scenes.

ROAD AVENGER 1993

WOLF TEAM

We've a confession to make. We're including *Road Avenger* for no other reason than it's a guilty pleasure. First released in arcades by Data East in 1985, it was a laserdisc game that jumped on the *Dragon's Lair* bandwagon (which is also on Mega-CD). Animated by Toei Animation, it's a great-looking racing game, but a rather simplistic one, as you just follow onscreen instructions in order to complete each of the nine stages.



PANIC! 1993

SEGA, OFFICE 1, WAHAHA HONPO

This bizarre oddity wasn't released in Europe and is one of the strangest releases you're likely to encounter on the system. Playing as a young boy named Slap, you simply navigate a series of rooms by pressing buttons. Touching a button either propels Slap deeper into the maze or triggers some truly strange animations. And that's about it. There's no real gameplay to speak of whatsoever and you've no idea what a button will do until it's pressed, but it's surprisingly absorbing, as you never know what surreal scene you're going to end up encountering. It's one of the few Mega-CD games to feature mouse support.







SILPHEED 1993

GAME ARTS

Game Arts' title caused quite a stir on release as it featured polygon ships fighting against a funky pre-rendered video background. It's a huge improvement over the original 1986 PC 8801 release, offering enhanced gameplay and visuals that really play to the Mega-CD's strengths and still hold up pretty well today. The distinctive use of pre-rendered backgrounds was also used in shooters such as *Starblade* and *Galaxian 3*. While *Silpheed* is let down somewhat by a selection of rather weedy power-ups, its core gameplay is excellent, with varied waves of enemies to battle and some pretty intense boss fights. A rather uninspiring sequel appeared on the PS2 in 2000.

SNATCHER 1994

KONAMI

Set in the future and clearly inspired by numerous science-fiction films, including James Cameron's *The Terminator* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, *Snatcher* has you playing as Gillian Seed, a member of the JUNKER. Artificial life-forms known as Snatchers are killing humans and integrating themselves into society and Gillian must stop them, aided and abetted by a group of entertaining and well fleshed-out characters.

Utilising a first-person perspective, a vast amount of *Snatcher*'s gameplay involves interacting with the environment and using Seed's cute robot, Metal Gear, to communicate with other key characters in the game. It's also livened up with shooting gallery sections in which Seed must take down enemies that appear on a 3x3 grid. Highly stylistic and featuring some surprisingly great dialogue and a constantly twisting plot, *Snatcher* is an essential addition to any Mega-CD's owner library, which explains why it's continually climbing in price.









ETERNAL CHAMPIONS: CHALLENGE FROM THE DARK SIDE 1994

SEGA INTERACTIVE

Most of the available Mega-CD brawlers are ports, so *Eternal Champions* makes our list. It features all of the playable and non-playable characters from the original Mega Drive game, but also introduces 13 new brawlers (many of which are unlockable). It also introduces gory new "Cinekills", which are basically over-the-top FMV-based fatalities. In fact it goes all out on finishing moves, also adding "Vendettas" and "Sudden Death" moves. Add a huge number of gameplay modes and it's easily the Mega-CD's most comprehensive fighter.





EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 1994

WESTWOOD ASSOCIATES

This old-school dungeon crawler works surprisingly well on Sega's add-on, particularly if used in conjunction with the available mouse. Gameplay-wise it's identical to the earlier Amiga and PC versions of the game, meaning you traverse a multi-level dungeon, battling dangerous monsters, solving various puzzles and advancing your group of heroes. It's by-the-numbers, but immensely satisfying to play thanks to an exceptionally atmospheric soundtrack by Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima.



MANSION OF HIDDEN SOULS 1994

SYSTEM SACOM

This intriguing point-and-click adventure has you searching a haunted mansion for several ghosts that take on the form of beautiful butterflies. Structurally, it's very similar to the likes of *Myst*, *D* and *Uninvited* as you explore the pre-rendered FMV areas looking for clues, while trying to solve the admittedly obtuse puzzles that are found throughout the large mansion. A remake for Sega's Saturn followed almost immediately, but failed to make an impact in the same way that the original did.

SHINING FORCE CD 1994

SONIC! SOFTWARE PLANNING

This gargantuan strategy RPG is both a remake and a brand new game in its own right. Spread across four books, the first two books are adaptations of the *Shining Force Gaiden* games that were released for Sega's Game Gear. The second two books are adventures in their own right and superb ones at that. There's a huge amount of content to work through and plenty of interesting characters to interact with. The combat engine is as robust as ever, while clever map designs always keep the battles exciting.





DUNGEON EXPLORER 1994

WESTONE CO

This is effectively a supercharged version of the PC Engine game that was released in 1989. It plays a lot more like *Gauntlet* than its predecessor and only caters for four players (the PC Engine offering managed five via the multitap). It features far superior audio and graphics while the presentation in general is a lot slicker and features a different range of heroes. There's a handy save option too, which is useful because it's quite a tough challenge.





HEART OF THE ALIEN 1994

INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT

Being released exclusively in North America meant that many haven't played the true sequel to *Another World*. Not wanting to create a traditional follow-up, developer Eric Chahi instead decided to retell the original game's story through the viewpoint of the alien that hero Lester encounters. It's a neat trick that effortlessly expands the story of the original (which is also generously included), explaining how Buddy comes into contact with Lester in the first place. As with *Another World*, the cinematic action features a lot of instant kill scenarios for those with poor reactions, but perseverance (and a little bit of skill) pays dividends.

EARTHWORM JIM 1995

SHINY ENTERTAINMENT



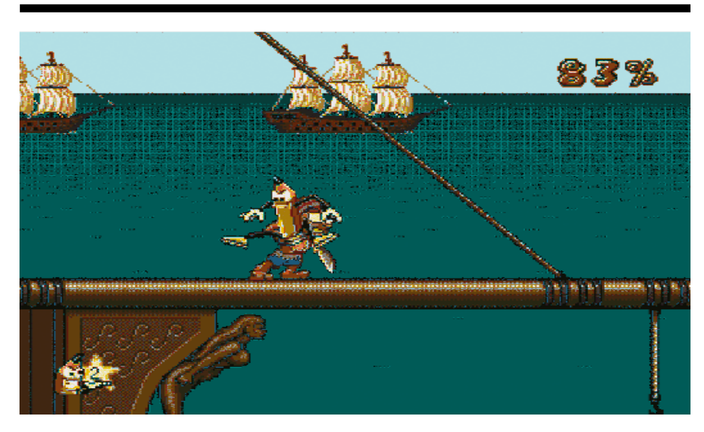
Unlike many upgraded Mega Drive games, *Earthworm Jim* was actually worth buying over its original incarnation. The additional storage capacity of CD-ROM allowed Shiny to really go to town on the animation, bestowing over 1,000 more frames of animation. It also adds a remixed soundtrack, extends some of the existing levels and adds a brand new one called "Big Bruty". It finally adds alternate endings for completing the "Practice" and "Difficult" difficulties.

POPFUL MAIL: MAGICAL FANTASY ADVENTURE 1994

SIMS



This charming adventure game reminds us of the later *Wonder Boy* games. It cleverly combines platforming, exploration and RPG mechanics to create one of the Mega-CD's best games. *Popful* meets several characters who can join her on her quest and the dialogue throughout is superb, thanks to a painstaking localisation by Working Designs. What a pity then that it never received a European release.



WILD WOODY 1995

SEGA MULTIMEDIA STUDIO

For some reason, Sega felt it was a good idea to make an anthropomorphic pencil the star of one of its last Mega-CD games. It wasn't. While *Wild Woody* is full of nice ideas – Woody can kill enemies by erasing them and can use a sketchbook to draw certain items to help him on his quest – it's let down by atrocious controls and clumsy collision detection.

BEHIND THE SCENES

MEDAL OF HONOR

Before Battlefield, before Call Of Duty, there was Medal Of Honor, the game that kickstarted the military shooter fad that has now worn thin decades later. **games™** explores how the original turned World War II into a videogame staple

Released: 1999
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Key Staff: Chris Cross (lead designer), Peter Hirschmann (writer and producer), Dmitri Ellingson (lead artist), Michael Giacchino (composer)

THIS ISN'T AN INDUSTRY BEREFT OF HISTORY. For as young as gaming is, its changing trends, its ever-shifting state of major players, and its evolving culture is as rich and as deep as anything you might find in any other media industry. Film, for all its grandeur, took decades to settle into a language, a manual that now all but the arthouse scene seem to ardently stick to. Music, one of the oldest forms of creative endeavours, is now as beleaguered by genre expectations as it is by the elite record labels deciding who should be our heroes. And yet here are videogames: still as unstable as it ever was, but forever providing entertainment, forever forging innovation, forever creating a new history. That's the beauty of our industry: it might be unpredictable, tied – as it is – to the machinations of technological advancement, but all it takes is one new, fascinating game doing something just a little bit differently for it to knock everything off kilter, to create a new way of playing and a new milestone for other developers to look towards. Once upon a time, *Medal Of Honor* was that game.

At a time when the PlayStation was blasting its way into immortality and hot on the heels of Nintendo's N64, there was an opportunity for entrepreneurial developers and publishers looking to ride the peak of Sony's tsunami. Here was a console enabling 3D gaming like never before, and yet without a heritage or a history of its own that it was beholden to. Here there were opportunities. But while much of the innovation of *Medal Of Honor* would come from those who developed it, the core idea – from the very beginning – owed itself to the mind of Steven Spielberg, courtesy of his shared interest in videogames with his son Max. DreamWorks Interactive, then still being led by the famed director, had seen an early prototype of the game that had sparked imagination in the man who, then, was gearing up to release *Saving Private Ryan*. What Spielberg had envisioned was a shooter with the same periodic setting as his film, but with the gameplay,



There could be enemies lurking around any corner, and through these narrow streets it was tense creeping around every turn.

mechanics and quality of Rare's *GoldenEye* for N64. "On the PlayStation, no one had done a first-person shooter like that, on PlayStation, right?" explains Christopher Cross, the lead designer on the original and many of the ensuing *Medal Of Honor* games. "And Steven Spielberg was a heavy gamer at the time, he and his kids. He loved *GoldenEye*, so he was basically suggesting peanut butter and chocolate: 'Let's take *GoldenEye* and put it with World War II'. Believing that *Saving Private Ryan* would create a surge of interest in the setting across a spectrum of media gave the spark, but the hard part was figuring out how to achieve such a goal.

"We took the mission of *GoldenEye* with World War II very seriously," recalls Cross. "So the only two first-person games before *Medal Of Honor* on the PSX were *Disruptor* by Insomniac, which was not a great shooter, and then there was *Jumping Flash*, which was arguably a first-person platformer not a shooter. We knew that the console could do first-person, but how we were going to make this work on console was a lot of what the first game was." There was little to compare to during development, and so the team at DreamWorks Interactive had to first code an engine capable not only of rendering suitably on hardware that, especially back then, could not compete with PCs. But it wasn't just the engine that the team needed to overcome, either, since Sony would quickly begin to introduce a new peripheral, one that would become synonymous with gaming.

WE TOOK THE MISSION OF GOLDENEYE WITH WORLD WAR II VERY SERIOUSLY

"We had to design the game to work without the DualShock analogue sticks," laments Cross, "because the dual analogue was introduced to us in the middle of that project and hardware adoption, if it's not part of the OEM, is usually pretty low, right? And so we were like 'people are going to buy this game and not have dual sticks'. So part of the flavour and part of what makes the first *Medal Of Honor* so amazing is that we built it to be played – and be enjoyable – for D-pad only. Which is why some of the configs seem a little weird, and that's because it was a transition time between interface."

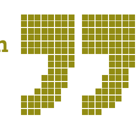
Though it's quite primitive – and basic even by the game's own standards – the opening level left an impact because of its impressive visuals.



WHAT THEY SAID…

Medal Of Honor's story and characters feel real. When I disposed of those Nazis in a blaze of glory with the machine guns, grenades and bazookas, I felt like a hero

Official PlayStation Magazine US, 1999



But this couldn't be just like any other shooter that was on the market. At the time, this was a genre born and raised on the arcade stylings of PC gaming, of *Doom* and *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. *Medal Of Honor* couldn't feature the same speed and pace, it was limited by the hardware in this regard. It had to adopt a slower approach, it had to have more thoughtful gameplay. And that, in turn, led to a more serious approach to the tone of the game. If this was to be gaming's *Saving Private Ryan*, then it couldn't take cues from the Nazi-hunting antics of *Wolfenstein*'s BJ Blazkowicz. It had to have an impact that hadn't been seen before. "Almost all of the tuning came back to how we support a slower pace," says Cross. "And a more thoughtful, less arcade style of gameplay. And so one of the watch words was 'realistic, not realism'. We wanted it to feel authentic as far as what it's pace was, without making it like one-shot kills."

Cross adds that this slower pace was a deliberate choice, and for a number of very important reasons. "We had to take into account not being able to make use of dual sticks," he says of the key focus of that decision, but it ultimately led to a slower gameplay that ended up forging the foundation of how a lot of modern military FPS games are played, even to this day. "I did almost triple the gameplay time," Cross admits. "It was very deliberate: you have to move to a position, decide what you're going to do in that position, then you are going to go into aim mode. And then aim mode is not a very fast mode of gameplay, just by the very nature of it not using an analogue input, there was no circle strafing. It was basically that we wanted to encourage stop and cover, think out your tactics and shoot. And so cover gameplay became a very important part of the equation."

IT WAS KIND OF LIKE DOING SCOOBY DOO DOORS, TO GIVE THE PLAYER THE ILLUSION THAT THERE WERE MORE ENEMIES

But it wasn't just enough to rely on the controller to achieve this more authentic pace, either. The world had to be designed to allow for such gameplay, which meant careful positioning of barrels, crates and hedges. That, in turn, meant there needed to be a carefully constructed level layout, with patrol routes and health packs. But guiding the player into playing the 'proper' way wasn't an easy task, there wasn't much for DreamWorks Interactive to base its designs on, and so it had to come up with new methods of training players, methods that would later go on to become design elements of almost every first-person shooter since. "You can't run and gun this game," says Cross, "and that's something that we also built in, there was a penalty for just running out in the open. Basically, the longer you stayed out in the open, the more deadly the enemies got. They were basically so that you would get that feeling of 'oh shit, I should find a wall, or a corner or something to stay near'."

That wasn't all, either. Cross explains that while the technology was still a ways away from including cover points that players could snap to and take aim from, they could still utilise the environment to help guide the player into playing the game as it was intended. By having enemies take cover behind some object for protection, the player could instinctively learn that they, too, should be doing something similar. "It was like a first-person



■ The levels where you had to play spy changed the pace of the game suitably, and were notable for their varied objectives.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WW2 FPS GAMES

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MILITARY FPS GAMES



1992
WOLFENSTEIN 3D
The exploits of BJ Blazkowicz recreated the popular *Doom*-esque shooter of the era with a fictionalised sci-fi WWII setting, replete with mecha-Hitler.



1997
MEDAL OF HONOR
Helped along by Steven Spielberg, this was a more sombre approach to WWII than the likes of *Wolfenstein*, and led to an influx of similar WWII shooters.



2001
RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
Perhaps spurred on by *Medal Of Honor*, Activision's sequel took a more serious tone, while still keeping a tongue-in-cheek setting.



2001
WORLD WAR II ONLINE
The first – and only – MMOFPS set during World War II, it included features that allowed players to work their way up the military ranks.



2002
BATTLEFIELD 1942
EA's most significant FPS franchise was born here, with DICE's original *Battlefield* title using the WWII setting for the team-based multiplayer.



2002
MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE
Easily the most significant *MOH* title, the opening replicated *Saving Private Ryan*'s intro, giving a real sense of fear and adrenaline.



2003
CALL OF DUTY
Not to be undone by EA, Activision finally caught up with its first release of *Call Of Duty* – a series that could never quite dislodge *MOH* in the WWII setting.

Dogs weren't commonly seen in PlayStation games, let alone animated and built with their own AI.



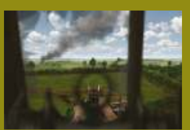
Spielberg's input into the game was more cinematic, unsurprisingly, noting places that were good for explosive set-pieces.

trick," explains Cross. "You show the player what their body should be doing by doing it with an NPC. And that especially works when you have an allied NPC, so you can see 'oh, he's behind cover, I'm going to go and take cover with him'. And so the subconscious work that that does on the player is 'oh, I should be doing something like that'. It was about finding ways to create that smart pace of gameplay. It's like an old western, right? You're behind a barrel and you're like 'oh shoot, okay, then take cover', the barrel gets hit a couple of times, stand-up, shoot again. That was definitely very deliberate." There was an added bonus that having the NPCs interact with the environment around them brought with it, however, one that was more psychological than mechanical: "The other part of that, and I think this is something that is integral to the product, we always try to do animation that showed enemies and NPCs interacting with the environment because not only did it make the NPCs seem more real or believably human, it made the environments more solid as well."

The original *Medal Of Honor*, then, was a game of limitations. It had nothing of its ilk – other than *GoldenEye* – to compare to, no design concepts to copy or genre expectations to build upon. Less still, there were no examples of how the technology could even work on the



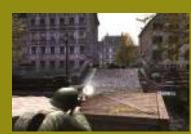
2003
DAY OF DEFEAT
Originally a mod for *Half-Life*, *Day Of Defeat* caught the attention of Valve – who teamed up with Activision to repack the multiplayer mode into a retail release.



2005
BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30
Though the tactical shooting was highly praised, Ubisoft's series never achieved the same popularity as its competitors.



2005
SNIPER ELITE
Taking a unique twist by focusing on sniper combat, this series has since become much-loved for its emphasis on gore and its alternative approach to WWII.



2006
RED ORCHESTRA: OSTFRONT 41-45
Also adopting a multiplayer-only approach to WWII, *Red Orchestra* is as much loved as it is loathed for its strategic combat.



2008
CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR
Post-*Modern Warfare*, this would be the last *Call Of Duty* WWII game, at least until Activision pushed the sci-fi combat as far as it could.



2014
WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER
After another hiatus, BJ Blazkowicz receives another reboot, retaining the setting's sci-fi twist while reliving the arcade-style combat.



2017
CALL OF DUTY: WWII
Having done modern combat to death, Activision is returning to WWII. All eyes are on *COD* to see if the setting can become popular once more.

> A GAMING EVOLUTION Medal Of Honor > MOH: Frontline > Medal Of Honor [2010]



With the PS2 came a greater depth of cinematic control - including a recreation of *that Saving Private Ryan* intro.



After a much-needed hiatus the *Medal Of Honor* series is rebooted and finally moves into a modern military setting.



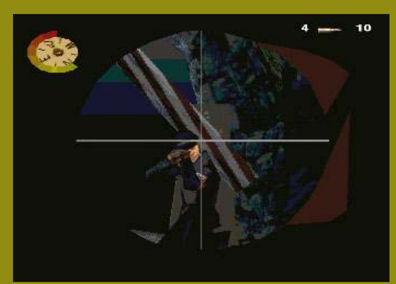


THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

How the Spielberg effect was felt on the Medal Of Honor team…

"A COUPLE OF DIFFERENT times on *Medal Of Honor*, Steven Spielberg came through to review the product, but it was more like a tour. Like, 'Oh, what's this? What's that?' and then he'd go and play the Neo Geo or the pinball machines and then see the other products, it wasn't only just for *Medal Of Honor*. It was always interesting because he always came through with a sense of play and wonder. Did he really change things? Well… we definitely used some of his suggestions, I'll say that, and some of them are directly in the game, some of the exploding barrels setups. Some things were impossible to do, so were like 'there's no way we can do that'."





PlayStation, and Cross explains a long list of ways that the game was jerry rigged to function ably on the PS1. Everything from the counts of polygons, to the way levels were designed to allow for triggers that spawned in enemies or even engineers who worked solidly to right assembly code that would maximise the efficiency of the code. To hear Cross tell it, the team behind *Medal Of Honor* had to fight their own war for every single byte of memory. One such example he gives is of the weapons in the game, at first limited to four – because of memory constraints – but then modelled in such a way to save precious memory. "So if you saw the weapons on a 3D program, some of them didn't have backfaces," explains Cross, referring to the textures on the sides of the weapons. "They only existed in the sides of the gun that you could see. So the top faces and the side faces and sometimes the bottom, depending on what weapon it was because maybe you reloaded from the bottom. The other thing was that they were flared, like if you saw them in a non-perspective camera, they were built like muskets. They flared out like those so that in perspective they looked correct."

This, Cross points out, was one of the many ways that the team had to find obtuse workarounds just to get the game to run on the limited hardware of the PS1. "There were things we were doing in the first *Medal Of Honor* that are highly specific and optimised for the PlayStation. For example, if you go back and play *Medal Of Honor*, one of those things you won't realise is that there's only ever four enemies on screen at one time. A lot of the design work came in through this. We had a bunch of different spawning techniques that we developed to give the player the illusion that there were more enemies. It was kind of like doing *Scooby Doo* doors, so when one enemy died, we'd spawn another one."

It might sound funny to hear it, but think back to your time with *Medal Of Honor*: there were no heavy gunfights as you rattled down one Nazi after another, instead your memory is likely filled with thoughts of taking shots at a handful of enemies, the typical black fog of 3D PS1 games creepily hanging behind them. This was a necessity, says Cross, but even this had to match up to that overarching design goal: *realistic, not realism*. "If it was always done the same way then the player would have noticed," says Cross. "They would know that as soon as they shoot one guy, another guy will come out of that door. So we built in all these mechanisms to make that feel more organic. We would have multiple spawn points and also different unit thresholds. So instead of just replacing an enemy when they died we would have, like, two guys come out, you shoot one and that spawns two more so that the mental story was that he called in



Hearing an enemy yell 'Alarm!' was something that caused dread, though the limitations of the engine meant you'd never be overwhelmed too much.



reinforcements and then those three would not trigger anybody else until they're all dead and then four guys would show up."

It's a testament to a clear vision, then, that the team behind *Medal Of Honor* stayed true to its goal, in spite of the limitations it was facing. These clever ways of overcoming memory restrictions were all integral to that all-important motto, that target of a realistic World War II shooter. It was this theme that ran throughout *Medal Of Honor*, to create a game that kept true to the setting and the tone but never at the expense of making something that was fun to play. This was the core pillar of the game, a facet that each of the respective avenues of development – design, programming, art – all revolved around, even when they worked independently from one another. It was the foundation of the game, suggests Cross, and the problem that they had to each solve with their own individual tasks. It meant that when the teams would reconvene, they could look at the separate functions of the game and combine them to create something that was greater than the sum of its parts. "So we would come back and we would say, 'Okay, so what does authentic mean to you?' And here's what it means to me in design," recalls Cross, giving an understanding of how that synergic belief in the game's core ideals really worked. "Basically, we just had really good teamwork. Like, 'Okay, how do we coordinate to get this to happen?' So for example we wanted our environments to feel real, but to still have a style. So, how do we build these to have good flow? For example, there were places where we would have two areas next to each other, and the background artist would say 'this doesn't feel like a real place, we need a road in between'. So we'd put a road there. It became very organic since we were all working towards the same goals process. It always came back to that: what are the guiding principles? We want it to *feel* real, but it doesn't have to *be* real."

WE DIDN'T THINK ABOUT BEING A STAND-OUT ORIGINAL PRODUCT BECAUSE IT WAS MORE ABOUT GETTING PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND IT

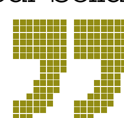
This, of course, was always going to be a tough ask. On paper, it's something of a surprise that *Medal Of Honor* made it at all. It was so different in a multitude of ways – from its po-faced historical setting to its slow-paced gameplay – that it could've been a hard sell for EA and DreamWorks Interactive. Perhaps that's a testament to the team's temerity, that drive to create something so grounded. "I think we always knew it was going to be different," says Cross, "but, it's interesting, because you have to remember that there weren't a lot of copycat products at the time. Everybody was trying to do custom-made products. There were very few knockoffs, even things within the same genre were significantly different. It was just a different time. We didn't think very much about being a stand-out original product, because it was more about 'how do we get people to understand this in a way we want them to play it?' It was like, how do we walk the balance between education and entertainment and make it feel like it was on the right line between fun and taste and not glorifying war."

The result, of course, was something compelling. *Medal Of Honor* released on PlayStation in 1999. And it was a historic moment for the industry. Yet while it's easy to sit here with hindsight and claim that here was a title destined for greatness, it seems that was never the development team's goal. They simply wanted to make something different, the result being a game whose individual innovations ended up shaping the history of the FPS genre like never before, pointing it in new directions for years to come.

WHAT THEY SAID...

But nothing really adds to the game's realism like the enemy AI, which is more advanced than any we've seen in console first-person shooters before. The guards aren't always smart, but they're clearly smarter than the ones found in Metal Gear Solid

GameSpot, 1999





INTERVIEW
YUAN WANG

He's had a long career and has been involved in many iconic PC games. **games™** chats to the former operations manager of Blizzard Taiwan about his life in videogame development

SELECT GAMEOGRAPHY



Descent [1995] Programmer



Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight [1997] Programmer



New Legends [2002] Producer/ Developer

GROWING UP, what was your first experience of videogames?

I was born in Taiwan, but grew up in the Boston suburbs, and my dad worked at MIT. So I would go to his lab and play with his terminal computer – I think it was something like a DEC VT100. I remember playing *Adventure* and *Rogue* back in those days. At home I had an Apple IIe, and the game that captured my imagination was *Wizardry*.

You were clearly into gaming – did you envisage at this point a career in games?

As a kid, I don't think I fully realised that humans made games! A career making them never even crossed my mind.

Parallax Software was formed in 1993 by Matt Toschlog and Mike Kulas. How did you start work there?

I graduated with a BSEE from university and did on-campus interviews with over 30 companies. One of the companies was Looking Glass Software. They sent Mike Kulas, who was a contractor for them at the time, to conduct the interview. I remember, he was the only interviewer who wasn't wearing a business suit – he was wearing a green sweater! I stayed in touch with Mike, and when he and Matt started Parallax, they hired John Slagel and myself as their first employees. I was only 22 at the time, and only realised I wasn't working for Looking Glass when one of the to-do items on the whiteboard was "figure out a name for the company".

Parallax's first game was a big one: the 3D space shooter *Descent* [for the full story on *Descent*, see games™ 155]. You played a key role in its creation.

Working on *Descent* was my first professional programming job, and Mike and Matt were my first mentors for game development. We developed on Intel 486 PCs running MSDOS. It's mind-boggling to see how far we've come.

Was your role the same for the sequel?

I wore many hats back then: IT, building computers and networks, programming, game design, level design and even a little bit of art. For *Descent 2*, I was involved early on with design, but I left early during the development.

Why did you leave?

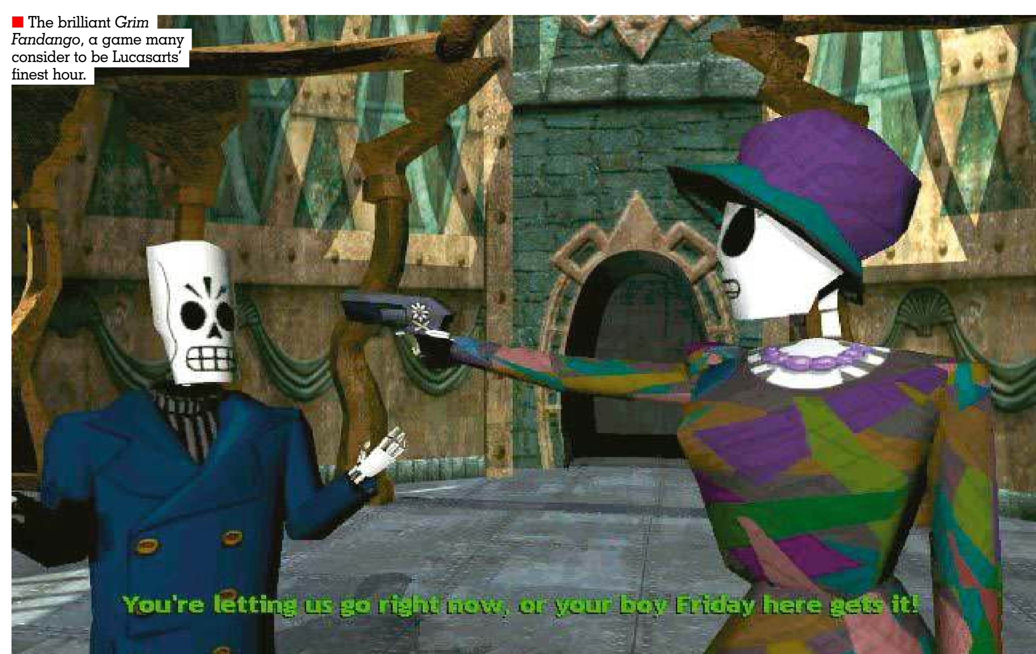
My wife and I wanted to move out to California [Parallax was based in Illinois] – it was always a dream of ours. My friend Rob Huebner, who worked on *Descent* with us, was interviewing around the industry and knew I was looking to move. When he interviewed for the *Jedi Knight* team, he recommended me and I came on board as well. Rob and I ended up being roommates.

AS A KID, I DON'T THINK I FULLY REALISED THAT HUMANS MADE GAMES!

How did working at Lucasarts contrast with Parallax?

Parallax was basically a super scrappy start-up during the development of *Descent*. It was an amazing experience helping to build a company in my early twenties, but it had many stressful moments. In contrast, Lucasarts was well-funded and had cool perks like great holiday parties, movie screenings at Skywalker Ranch, and basically being around *Star Wars* all the time. I am a huge *Star Wars* nerd, so it definitely was a cool time in my life. We worked long hours at both places, and played lots of games after work. I remember thinking that it was a good


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■ The brilliant *Grim Fandango*, a game many consider to be Lucasarts' finest hour.



■ The *Descent* team from 1993 – Yuan Wang is on the far left.

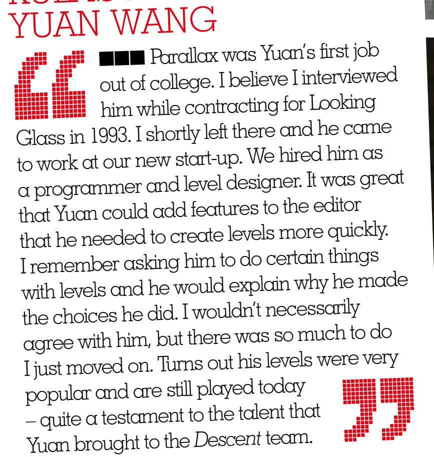


■ Descent was Wang's first commercial game, and a huge success for Parallax Software.





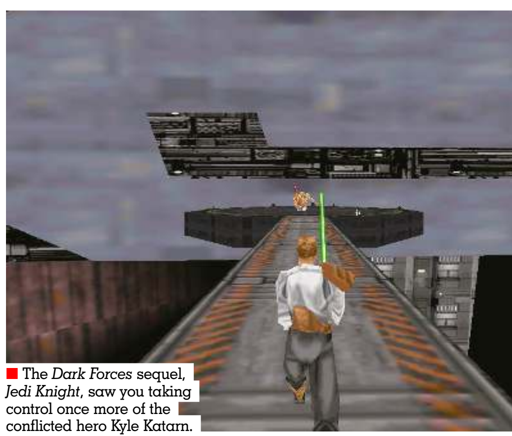
PARALLAX BOSS MIKE KULAS REMEMBERS YUAN WANG



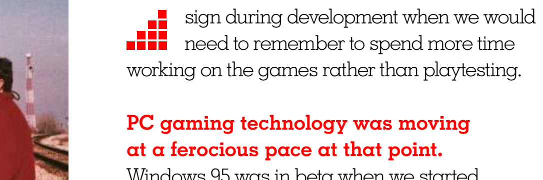
“■■■ Parallax was Yuan's first job out of college. I believe I interviewed him while contracting for Looking Glass in 1993. I shortly left there and he came to work at our new start-up. We hired him as a programmer and level designer. It was great that Yuan could add features to the editor that he needed to create levels more quickly. I remember asking him to do certain things with levels and he would explain why he made the choices he did. I wouldn't necessarily agree with him, but there was so much to do I just moved on. Turns out his levels were very popular and are still played today – quite a testament to the talent that Yuan brought to the *Descent* team.”



■ Infinite Machine's *New Legends* was an Xbox launch title – but not a successful one.



■ The *Dark Forces* sequel, *Jedi Knight*, saw you taking control once more of the conflicted hero Kyle Katarn.



sign during development when we would need to remember to spend more time working on the games rather than playtesting.

PC gaming technology was moving at a ferocious pace at that point.

Windows 95 was in beta when we started development on *Jedi*, and 3D graphics hardware was barely coming into existence. And the internet was around, but nothing like it is today. But both teams were pretty close and I've stayed in touch with most of the people in some way. We've done a few *Descent* reunions – it would be cool to do a *Jedi* one.

Your career was continuing apace at Lucasarts with involvement on *Grim Fandango* and *Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine*. What do you recall of these iconic games?

Both of those games used technology that we built, including a level editor tool that I made with Winston Wolff, another programmer. We called it LEIA – Level Editing Is Art. Unfortunately, I never had the chance to play the *Indiana Jones* game, but *Grim Fandango* is one of my favourite games of all time – I love the artwork and the storyline, just beautiful.

You eventually left Lucasarts and created your own studio along with Justin Chin *[Jedi Knight* project lead].

Justin and I started Infinite Machine as we wanted to create a studio with a strong culture and create a spiritual successor to *Jedi Knight*. Our original publisher was GT Interactive, who we signed a deal with in 1998 to create a PC shooter with an alternate post-apocalyptic future China theme, using the Unreal engine. During the Infogrames acquisition of GT, our project was cancelled and we had to scramble to find a new publisher. THQ picked us up as an Xbox launch title, so we started working to port the game from PC to Xbox.

What was it like developing on that new platform?

The Xbox was great to develop for. It used Visual Studio, DirectX 8 and the hardware was solid. However, we were using the Unreal Engine during the console transition so it was still challenging to port. Epic was on a later schedule for the Unreal Warfare engine which supported DirectX 8, and we were unable to use their latest tech. We had to rebuild parts of the Unreal engine, which was architected as a software rasterised BSP engine, and not very suitable for DirectX 8. We also had to redesign the game from a first-person-shooter that had melee combat (like *Jedi Knight*) to a third-person martial arts combat game that incorporated guns.

How did the game, *New Legends*, do?

It wasn't a commercial success, but building and running Infinite Machine was my real-world business school where I learned how to run a company, negotiate legal contracts and manage a team of 20 people.

What happened after the end of Infinite Machine?

I had two offers on the table straight after. One was to work on *Sim City 4* at Maxis as a graphics programmer, and the other was at Midway, which was more of an overall development role. I chose Midway, and moved to San Diego at that point.

What was your role at Midway?

I was a technical director for its third-party publishing division. The way things were structured was that there would be a producer to manage the production, an art director to manage the visuals and a technical director to manage the programming and other technical aspects of the projects in the interests of the publisher. This involved evaluating the development teams, milestone approvals and being the publisher counterpart for the technical leads at the third-party studios – and support them as necessary.

IT WASN'T A COMMERCIAL SUCCESS, BUT BUILDING AND RUNNING INFINITE MACHINE WAS MY REAL-WORLD BUSINESS SCHOOL

You presumably did the latter role for Midway's *The Suffering*?

When I joined, that was already under development by Surreal Software. I had met some of those guys previously at industry events, so had a previous relationship. They had a solid tech team, so, yes, I supported them more on their requirements in tech terms. Generally, as a technical director for Midway, most of the work was helping the production teams firefight on projects that weren't going well.

What happened after Midway?

Justin and I explored rebooting Infinite Machine with some of the team, but that didn't happen. So I started work at Disney as a director of production, working for Buena Vista Games, which became Disney Interactive Studios. I worked in a production role, assisting various projects such as *Turok* and *Meet The Robinsons* with art and tech outsourcing. I spent most of my time sourcing and evaluating studios, putting together the project specs and legal contracts, and managing the production of the assets or code. I also had the opportunity to produce the *Meet The Robinsons* Nintendo DS project in Japan. It was an emergency special project that I built with a small studio in Tokyo called Altron. It was from contact to submission to Nintendo, a three month project, so that was actually the project I'm most proud of – it felt like an impossible mission, and I had to pull off some MacGyver moves to make it happen.

You then left Disney for an operational role at Blizzard?

I'd had conversations with Blizzard throughout the years, but nothing clicked until I was about to take a job offer in Singapore. As a formality before accepting, I asked for a reference from my old boss, who was then at Blizzard as the head of international publishing. He said, "Before you take that job, I could use your help in Taiwan." So I took a position as operations director for Blizzard Taiwan and managed a team responsible for go-to-market launches of all Blizzard's game in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. It was eye-opening to see the amount of work required to co-ordinate and simultaneously launch huge titles such as *World Of Warcraft*, *Starcraft 2* and *Diablo 3*. I was there for four years and helped launch eight titles.

So a lot of management roles – do you miss coding and creating games?

Sometimes. My son is into games now, and we talk about building something together. My own interests have shifted as I've gotten older, though.

What's your favourite game that you worked on, and the one you were most disappointed in?

Descent was my favourite, because the team was so small back then and I feel that it is the game that has the most of my personal creative energy in it. *New Legends* was the most disappointing – it had potential, but we could never pull it together.

You've had a broad career in videogames. How do you look back on it today?

I've learned everything that I could possibly ever want to know about the games industry and met some incredible people. I'm friends with many people that defined the industry, and it was a great and long set of chapters in my life. I wouldn't say I'm fond of it all, but it feels complete and closed. I still love playing games, and doing it with my kids is one of my favourite things to do in the world.

What are you up to today?

My career afforded me the opportunity to take some time off, so I've spent the last three years on a sabbatical – travelling the world, self-exploration and personal growth. I'm now focused on projects involving blockchain technologies, machine learning and I spend most of my time studying future technologies so I can write the next chapters in my career.

Super Smash Bros. was created by HAL Laboratory's Masahiro Sakurai, who is perhaps best known as the creator of one of Nintendo's most popular characters, Kirby.

GAME CHANGERS

SUPER SMASH BROS.

Released: 21 January 1999 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** HAL Laboratory **System:** N64

Nintendo's most audacious new idea also breathed fresh life into an ailing game genre

NINTENDO'S MOST VALUABLE asset has always been its characters. From recognisable leads such as Link, Mario and Samus, to those that are afforded less screen time – but no less admiration – such as Captain Falcon and Ness, Nintendo has always built its success around these icons. But if you look back to 1998, the idea of pitting these characters against one another was a difficult sell; fans were upset by the idea of Fox getting a beatdown from Kirby. Nintendo wasn't initially sold on the concept either, and there was a very real chance that *Super Smash Bros.* could have quietly faded from existence. It could have, that is, were it not for the insistence and perseverance of creators Masahiro Sakurai and the late Satoru Iwata.

Super Smash Bros. was imagined as an alternative to the 2D, one-on-one fighting games that Sakurai felt were crowding the market, offering instead a manic battle royale experience that could offer something new every time you played it. Iwata was intrigued by the prospect of an accessible four-player brawler that could utilise the Nintendo 64's unique joystick configuration. So intrigued, in fact, that he offered to program the earliest iterations of the game during his weekends to help bring Sakurai's singular vision to life. The coming together of both of those ideals gave birth to a fighting game that was unique to the industry, and influential in a way that is difficult to track.

SUPER SMASH BROS. WAS UNIQUE IN THAT IT WAS ACCESSIBLE

Known internally as *Dragon King: The Fighting Game* through '98, the game was initially designed with faceless fighter models, brawling against settings derived from photos taken outside of developer HAL Laboratory's office by a hurried Sakurai. It was reportedly fun, but it wasn't working. That's when the creative pairing took a risk that would ultimately pay huge dividends for all involved. As Sakurai tells it, the team approached Nintendo with an unauthorised build

SETTING THE STAGE

THE BEST ARENAS TO BATTLE ACROSS



HYRULE CASTLE

★ Who'd have ever thought that a rooftop would become the stage for some of the most exciting encounters in *Super Smash Bros.*? It's a tight space for four-player brawls and ensures that positioning is challenged as much as your skill in combat.



KONGO JUNGLE

★ As Donkey Kong's home stage, Kongo Jungle has featured in every *Super Smash Bros.* game and continues to be an old favourite, with its pre-rendered backgrounds bringing back fond memories of 1994 SNES game *Donkey Kong Country.*



SECTOR Z

★ Designed as a homage to *Star Fox 64*, this is the first and only appearance for the stage and the largest to appear for any solo players out there among us. An enormous amount of fun with a ton of interesting environmental challenges to overcome throughout the fights.

of *Dragon King* featuring Mario, Donkey Kong, Samus and Fox and, after a little convincing, it got the green light from Nintendo's executives. *Super Smash Bros.* was born, a four-player fighting game that had a sense of personality; a fighter that could invigorate the player's imaginations in a way *Tekken* and *Street Fighter* never could, mobilising a truly all-star cast of contenders in a way that we had never seen before.

■ ■ ■ That isn't to say, of course, that other publishers hadn't tried before this. *The King Of Fighters* [1994] and *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter* [1996] both attempted to merge the battle royale concept with a crossover cast at its heart, but neither seemed to resonate in quite the same way. Perhaps it was the audacity of it all; it is, after all, easy to imagine a scenario in which Chun-Li and Rogue might become locked in a fair fight (of sorts), but Jigglypuff versus Donkey Kong? It's a bit of a stretch. But it worked and, more importantly, it was fun.

Super Smash Bros. was unique in that it was accessible. That's where much of the fun factor stemmed. Fighting games with roots in the arcade scene were inherently competitive; they were designed around the idea of confrontation, the mechanics and systems reflected that. While we aren't going to debate the legitimacy of *Super Smash Bros.* versus the likes of *Street Fighter*, *Samurai Shodown*, *The Outfoxies* and *Virtua Fighter*, there's simply no debating that it had a different, unique, spirit to it. The vibrancy of its stages and fighters, the easy-to-grasp mechanical design, and a pace designed to play for couch interplay between four friends – as opposed to coin-guzzling cabinets stuck in dingy arcades – resonated with an audience eager for something faster and fresher.

Super Smash Bros. brought the fighter to a wider, more mainstream audience. If you didn't care about learning finger-twisting combinations or counting frames – or simply had zero interest in figuring out what that actually meant – to compete with other players, *Super Smash Bros.* was the answer. It's the most successful pick-up and play fighting franchise in existence, albeit one that still manages to hide a surprising amount of depth underneath its approachable facade – the success of sequel *Super Smash Bros. Melee* at fighting tournaments around the globe is proof enough of that.

It's the party game that's suitable for all, an arena where those with a penchant for mashing buttons can have as good of a chance emerging the victor as a competitive player intent on learning a character back to front. *Super Smash Bros.* has emerged as one of the most successful fighting franchises in the industry and it isn't just because of its impressive roster, but because it's a game that's designed first and foremost to be fun. There are plenty of genre games out there that continue to expand and explore complexity within its systems, but there are none that can rival *Super Smash Bros.* for its combination of accessibility, balance and personality.



KEY FACTS

■ *Super Smash Bros.* features a roster of 12 playable fighters. Just eight were initially playable, with an additional four unlocked by the player meeting specific objectives and achieving certain criteria within the game.

■ While planned to be a Japanese-only game for N64, better than expected domestic success prompted Nintendo to release the game overseas. *Super Smash Bros.* had sold more than five million copies worldwide by 2001.

GAME CHANGERS

8 NOTABLE CROSSOVER BRAWLERS

BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN BEATING UP A BUNCH OF CHARACTERS FROM ANOTHER COMPANY'S ROSTER



MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES

■ In what is arguably the greatest crossover fighter of all time [yup, we are exercising our right to be super biased] *New Age Of Heroes* still stuns, 17 years after its release, offering a killer roster of 56 playable characters. The net is cast wide across both companies, giving a diverse range of fighter options for fans of both Marvel and Capcom.



THE KING OF FIGHTERS '94

■ SNK characters came together for the first time in 1994's *The King Of Fighters '94*, as brawlers from *Art Of Fighting*, *Fatal Fury*, *Ikari Warriors* and *Psycho Soldier* faced-off in what would be one of the earliest instances of franchise crossover in a fighting game. It might not have aged fantastically, but this game played with a template that many would go on to manipulate and refine over the years to follow.



SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

■ A gigantic sales success, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* represented a huge shift for the franchise. While *Melee* for GameCube expanded a number of the game's mechanics and further refined the balance, it was *Brawl* on Wii that demonstrated just how important the series had become. Snake and Sonic entered the fray; the first time iconic characters that were truly separated from the direct Nintendo brand were featured in the game.



PLAYSTATION ALL-STARS BATTLE ROYALE

■ One of the more audacious games Sony has attempted in recent memory. While a perfectly enjoyable fighting game, it just went to show that you can't force these crossovers. Big Daddy versus Dante, versus Parappa, versus *Evil* Cole MacGrath? It was just never going to work. The characters were too bland and too undefined to ever be able to truly support a game of this scope and design – good try though.





STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

■ Many said it would never happen – and in the case of *Tekken X Street Fighter* it likely won't – but this mad crossover is one of the finest examples we've ever received. The expansive roster and deep game mechanics are praiseworthy, though perhaps more impressive was the way in which Capcom was able to convert *Tekken*'s 3D characters (not to mention their movesets) into its 2D spaces so convincingly.



TATSUNOKO VS. CAPCOM: ULTIMATE ALL-STARS

■ Some 26 characters from an eclectic array of Capcom IP and a bizarre line-up of Tatsunoko Production anime franchises, such as *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*, *Yatterman* and *Neo-Human Casshern*, *Ultimate All-Stars* almost works in spite of itself. But the fact remains, this strange crossover fighter is actually a whole lot of fun.



MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

■ This release from Midway Games just goes to show how popular the crossover fighting game had become within a decade of its initial popularity surge. DC was never going to let the *Mortal Kombat* developer brutalise its most popular icons in the way that we would typically expect, and *MK Vs. DC* felt toned down as a result. Not being able to deliver a Fatality! to the likes of Batman and Wonder Woman was always going to disappoint.



SOULCALIBUR II

■ While this isn't strictly a crossover fighting game in the traditional sense, it is notable for the way in which Bandai Namco tried to leverage the selling power of the crossover for commercial gain. This would lead to *The Legend Of Zelda*'s Link, Heihachi Mishima of *Tekken* fame and Image Comics' Spawn making appearances for specific formats. This would escalate in later years to include the likes of Yoda/Darth Vader and Assassin's Creed's Ezio Auditore da Firenze.



The router also uses Amazon Alexa, giving you voice control over your home network.

You can connect up to four devices to the router – handy if you've several keen online gamers in the house.

NETGEAR NIGHTHAWK X4S SMART WIFI GAMING ROUTER

MANUFACTURER: **NETGEAR** PRICE: **£169.99**

AT THIS POINT there aren't many routers out there that can't handle a little gaming action. Nationwide, our internet connection speeds are gradually improving, manufacturers' understanding of what gamers need from the hardware has grown and we've all learned a thing or two about port forwarding. That all said, if a WiFi router comes along that can make our online lives a little easier we're not going to turn up our noses.

Enter Netgear's latest router solution. Designed specifically with gaming in mind, it offers some impressive features (160MHz bandwidth, and speeds of up to 2.53GB/s) that should put you in good stead for the coming months and years when it comes to high-speed internet access and solid connections. Perhaps most importantly for these modern times, it's a router built with multiple device connections in mind thanks to MU-MIMO and Quad Stream technology under the hood, so if you're in a house where several people have consoles, you can all connect.

Setting up the router is pretty easy thanks to a connection wizard that will walk you through the whole process, although playing around in the back-end using the web tool becomes a little bit more confusing. If you know your way around the language and menus of routers then you'll be fine, but you may need some additional help otherwise.

It's also worth keeping in mind that the X4S router comes in two varieties – with and without an in-built modem. We tested the modem-free version, which is obviously the cheaper option, although when compared to some similar devices it's still quite pricey. If you want the router with a modem then you'll be looking at an additional £100 on the price tag. That may be a little too rich for some.

www.netgear.co.uk

VERDICT 8/10

GAMING CLOTHING



MCCLOUD'S ARWING ACADEMY

Gotta love a little gaming business tie-in shirt, right? If Fox were handling some flight combat training courses we would likely be rejected on fitness and eyesight grounds, but we'd apply just to get our hands on a shirt like this.
www.gamerprint.co.uk



J!NX PERIPHERALS

Jinx is celebrating 18 years in the business of making gamer apparel, which is pretty impressive. The only thing more impressive are its unique designs, like this celebration of our cable-wrapped lifestyle.
www.jinx.com



ROCKET LEAGUE GAME ON JERSEY

Another piece of work from the Jinx team, this time an officially licensed jersey for all the *Rocket League* fanatics out there. It's one of the best videogame sports around, so you may as well show your colours on game day.
www.jinx.com

DARK SOULS BOARD GAME

SOLD BY: **GAME** PRICE: **$119.99**



The game even features boss battles – the Dancer Of The Boreal Valley is there on the board.

AFTER A HUGELY successful Kickstarter campaign, this board game adaptation of the *Dark Souls* experience is finally available and it's managed to remain far more faithful to its source material than you might expect. This is one tough board game, packed full of lore from the *Dark Souls* universe and with as much of a challenge to offer players as its digital forebear. Tabletop aficionados may want something more robust, but fans of the game will find plenty to appreciate.
www.thinkgeek.com



DESTINY HUNTER FIGURE

This collaboration between premium toy maker ThreeA and Bungie has resulted in a pretty amazing-looking replica of a classic Hunter from *Destiny*. ThreeA has made three variations on the Hunter, although it's the Autumn Shader version that you'll find on ThinkGeek at the moment. This one comes with the Imago Loop Hand Cannon, LDR-5001 Sniper Rifle and Tomorrow's Answer Rocket Launcher. All of the figures are 1/6 scale and come with a fabric cloak for additional authenticity.
www.thinkgeek.com



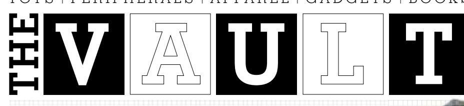
SHEIKAH SLATE SKETCHBOOK

Not only would this replica of the Sheikah Slate make a pretty awesome accessory for any Link cosplayers, but it's also wonderfully practical as a sketchbook. The pad itself has 100 pages, all of which are perforated so they're perfect for drawing little sketches and then passing on to friends or anyone you happen to meet on your adventures. Yeah, it's a pretty geeky thing to be carrying, but it's a far more practical Link accessory to walk around with than the Master Sword.
www.thinkgeek.com



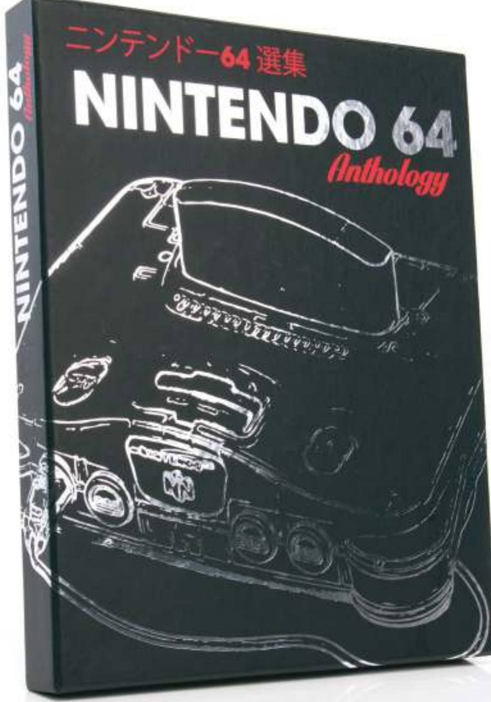
POKÉ BALL LUNCH CASE

We like to go out and catch our lunches since we just don't think there's much sport in having it prepared ahead of time, but if we happened to have something left over we would definitely consider using this Poké Ball lunchbox as a means of transporting it back into the **games™** office. It features a classic push-button release, plenty of room for snacks and is dishwasher safe. How many Poké Ball manufacturers can make those claims?
www.thinkgeek.com



NINTENDO 64 ANTHOLOGY

PUBLISHER: **GEEKS LINE**



THERE'S NOT MUCH about Mathieu Manent's exploration of the history, hardware, accessories and games of the Nintendo 64 that we can quibble with. It's an impressively comprehensive, well-researched and well-designed book, packed full of images and insight. We found only a couple of smaller issues that hold it back from being an all-time classic.

In terms of the games breakdown, it has all of the information you could wish for, with boxart of the PAL, Japanese and US editions (where appropriate), a game rating as well as a rarity rating and a breakdown of the gameplay and history of the titles covered. What's more, the screenshot quality, on the whole, is very good. We can tell you from experience that getting good-quality images of early 3D titles isn't always as easy as you might hope.

Beyond that central meat of the book, Manent has looked deeper into the history of the console as well as exploring how it has lived on through ports to the Nintendo DS and the franchises that appeared on other platforms in the years that followed the N64's demise. Interviews and quotes about the console from developers rounds off a pretty robust section giving some great context to the machine.

The only issues we really have are a couple of rather low-quality images here and there, which is a shame and we're also not sure about the overall structure, as the book is frontloaded with history while the games are quite deep into the package. But these are relatively small concerns in what is a generally enjoyable celebration of Nintendo's third home console.

www.funstockretro.co.uk



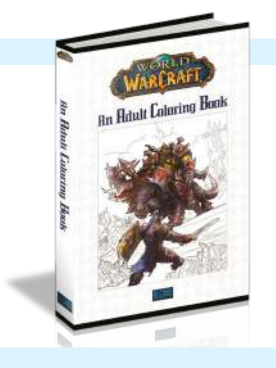
VERDICT 9/10



THE WITCHER VOLUME 3: CURSE OF CROWS

Collecting issues one through to five of the Curse Of Crows arc from *The Witcher* comic series, Geralt and Ciri team up in a tale of revenge. Since CD Projekt Red seems unlikely to return to this series, this might be your best bet for enjoying more stories in this world.

www.darkhorse.com



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: ADULT COLORING BOOK

We thought we were done with these, but they keep on being made. Now it's WOW's turn to get a colouring book adaptation, bringing you the best of Blizzard's concepts, paintings and sketches converted to outline form. Will it be relaxing? Might depend on whether the Horde terrifies you or not.

www.forbiddenplanet.com



MINECRAFT GUIDE TO CREATIVE

Part of a new official collection of *Minecraft* guides, this volume is all about getting the most out of your building skills. With excellent isometric images, blueprints and colour co-ordination tips, this is a great little addition to your *Minecraft* library. (We assume it's looking pretty packed.)

www.egmont.co.uk



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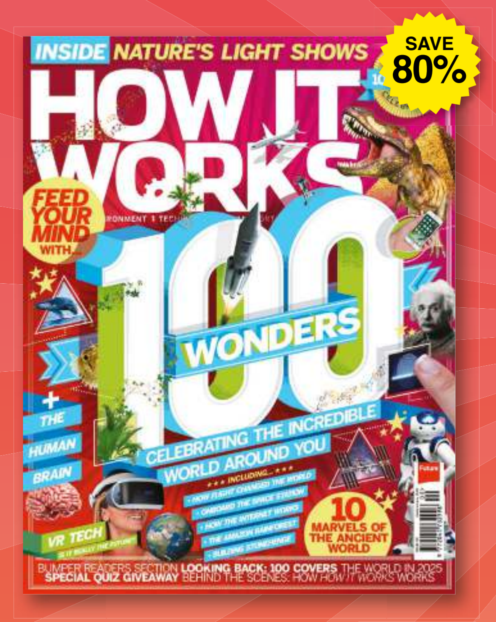
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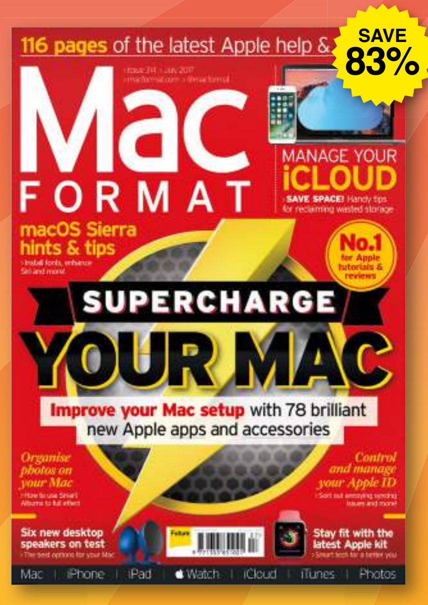
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